

# The White Company

## A Sequel to "Sir Nigel"

By Sir A. Conan Doyle

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Synopsis of preceding chapters at end of this installment.

### CHAPTER XIII.

The prince's reception-room was fitted up with all the pomp and luxury which the fame and power of its owner demanded. A high dais at the further end was roofed in by a broad canopy of scarlet velvet spangled with silver fleurs-de-lis.

In the center of the dais were two very high chairs. On that to the right sat a tall and well-formed man with red hair, a livid face, and a cold blue eye. He lounged back in a careless position, and yawned repeatedly. On the other throne there was perched bolt upright, a little round pippin-faced person, who smiled and bobbed to everyone whose eyes he chanced to meet. Between, and a little in front of them, on a humble chairette or stool, sat a slim dark young man, whose quiet attire and modest manner would scarce proclaim him to be the most noted prince in Europe. He sat with his hands clasped round his knee, his head slightly bent, and an expression of trouble upon his clear, well-chiselled features. Below on either side of the steps were forty or fifty English and Gascon barons, knights, and courtiers.

"There sits the prince," whispered Sir John Chandos as they entered. "He on the right is Pedro, whom we are about to put upon the Spanish throne. The other is Don James, whom we purpose with the aid of God to help to his throne in Majorca."

The prince had observed their entrance, and springing to his feet, he had advanced with a winning smile and the light of welcome in his eyes.

"Welcome to Aquitaine, Sir Nigel Loring and Sir Oliver Buttesham," said he. "Nay, keep your knee for my sweet father at Windsor. We are like to give you some work to do ere you see the downs of Hampshire once more. How many have you in your train?"

"I have forty men-at-arms, sire," said Sir Oliver.

"And I have one hundred archers and a score of lances; there are also three hundred men of the White Company who wait for me on the banks of the water upon the borders of Navarre."

"We hope to see you both in the banquet-hall anon," rejoined the prince. He bowed, and Chandos, plucking Sir Oliver by the sleeve, led them both away to the back of the press of courtiers.

The young ruler had sat listlessly upon his stool with the two puppet monarchs enthroned behind him, but of a sudden a dark shadow passed over his face, and he sprang to his feet, as if from a gust of passion which were the single blot upon his noble and generous character.

"How now, Don Martin de la Carran?" he cried. "How now, sirrah? What message do you bring to us from our brother of Navarre?" The new-comer to whom this abrupt query had been addressed was a tall and handsome cavalier who had just been ushered into the apartment. "Are the passes open to us, or does your master go back from his word pledged to me at Libourne no later than last Michaelmas?"

"It would become my gracious master, sire, to go back from promise given. He does but ask some delay and certain conditions and hostages."

"Conditions! Hostages!—he is speaking to the Prince of England, or is it to the bourgeois provost of some half-captured town? Conditions, quotha? He may find much to mend in his own condition, ere long. The passes are, then, closed to us?"

"Nay, sire—"

"They are open, then?"

"Nay, sire, if you would but—"

"Enough, enough, Don Martin," cried the prince. "It is a sorry sight to see so true a knight pleading in so false a cause. We know the doings of our Cousin Charles. We know that while with the right hand he takes our fifty thousand crowns for the holding of the passes open, he hath his left stretched to Henry Tristram, or to the King of France, all ready to take as many more for the keeping them closed. I know our good Charles, and he shall learn that I know him. He set his kingdom up to the bidder, like some scullion farrier selling a glandered horse. He is—"

"My lord," cried Don Martin, "I cannot stand here to hear such words of my master. Did he come from other lips I should know better how to answer them."

"Your hearing and your words, Don Martin, are such as I should have looked for in you. You will tell the king, your master, that he hath been paid his price, and that if he holds to his promise he hath my word for it that no scath shall come to his people, nor to their houses or gear. If, however, he have not my word, I shall come close to the heels of this message without his leave, and bearing a key with me which shall open all that he may close. Where is my Lord Chandos? Ha, Sir John, I commend this worthy knight to your care. You will see that he hath refection, and such a purse of gold as may defray his charges, for indeed it is great honor to any court to have within it so noble and gentle a cavalier."

"But I have tidings for you, my lords and ladies, that our brother of Lancaster is on his way for our capital with four hundred lances and as many archers to aid us in our venture. We shall then join the army at Dax and set our banners to the breeze once more."

A buzz of joy at the prospect of immediate action rose up from the group of warriors. The prince smiled at the martial ardor which shone upon every face around him.

"It will hearten you to know," he continued, "that I have sure advices that this Henry is a very valiant leader, and that he has it in his power to make such a stand against us as promises to give us much honor and pleasure. It is certain, also, that the brave and worthy Bertrand de Gascoigne hath ridden into France to the Duke of Anjou, and purposes to take back with him great levies from Picardy and Brittany. We hold Bertrand in high esteem, for he off before been at great pains to furnish us with an honorable encounter. What think you of it, my worthy Captain? He took you at Cocherel, and, by my soul! you will have the chance now to pay that score."

The Gascon warrior addressed winced a little at the allusion, nor were his countenances around him better pleased for on the only occasion when they had encountered the arms of France without English aid they had met with a heavy defeat.

"There are some who say, sire," said the burly De Clisson, "that the score is already overpaid, for that without Gascon help Bertrand had not been taken at Auray, nor had King John been overborne at Poitiers."

"By Heaven, but this is too much!" cried an English nobleman. "Methinks

that Gascony is too small a cock to crow so lustily."

"The smaller cock, my Lord Audley, may have the longer spur," remarked the Captain de Buch.

"May have his comb clipped if it makes over-much noise," broke in an Englishman.

"By Our Lady of Rocamadour!" cried the Lord of Mucident. "This is more than I can abide. Sir John Charnell, you shall answer to me for those words!"

"Froely, my lord, and when you will," returned the Englishman carelessly.

"My Lord de Clisson!" cried Lord Audley, "you look somewhat fixedly in my direction. By St. Stephen, I should be right glad to go further into the matter with you."

"And you, my Lord of Pommers," said Sir Nigel, pushing his way to the front. "It is in my mind that we might break lance in gentle and honorable debate over the question."

For a moment a dozen challenges flashed backward and forward at this sudden bursting of the cloud which had lowered so long between the knights of the two nations. Furious and exulting, the Gascons: white and cold and sneering the English, while the prince with a half-smile glanced from one party to the other, like a man who loved to dwell upon a fiery scene, and yet dreaded lest the mischief go so far that he might find it beyond his control.

"I have seen them fight too often not to know that they are very hardy and valiant gentlemen."

"And so say I," quoth the other Englishman: "but, certes, there is no fear of our forgetting it while they have a tongue in their heads."

"Nay, Sir John," said the prince, reprovingly. "But you hear, my lords of Gascony, that these gentlemen had no thought to throw a slur upon your honor or your valor, so let all anger fade from your mind. Clisson, Captain, De Pommers, I have your word?"

"We are subjects, sire," said the Gascon barons, though with no very good grace. "Our words are our law."

"Then shall we bury all cause of unkindness in a flagon of malvoisie," said the prince cheerily. "Ho, there! the doors of the banquet-hall! I have been over-long to my sweet spouse, but I shall be back with you anon."

### CHAPTER XIV.

While the prince's council was sitting, Alleyn and Ford remained in the outer hall, where they were soon surrounded by a noisy group of young Englishmen of their own rank, all eager to hear the latest news from England.

"How is it with the old man at Windsor?" asked one.

"And how with the good Queen Philippa?"

"How of England, my lads of Loring?" said a squire named Humphrey.

"I take it," said Ford, "that it is such as it was when you were there last, save

"If my hand is not hard, it is ready." "Ready? Ready for what? For the hem of my lady's train?"

"Ready to chastise insolence, sir!" cried Alleyn with flashing eyes.

"Sweet little coz!" answered the burly squire. "Such a dainty color! Such a mellow voice! Eyes of a bushful maid, and hair like a three years' babe! Viola!"

He passed his thick fingers roughly through the youth's crisp golden curls.

"You seek to force a quarrel, sir," said Alleyn white with anger.

"What then?"

"Why, you do it like a country boor, and not like a gentle squire. Hast been ill bred and as ill taught? I serve a master who could show you how such things should be done."

"And how would he do it, oh, pink of squires?"

"He would neither be loud nor would he be unmannerly, but rather more gentle than is his wont. He would say, 'Sir, I should like it as an honor to do some small deed of arms against you, not for mine own glory or advancement, but rather for the fame of my lady and for the upholding of chivalry.' Then he would draw his glove, thus, and throw it on the ground; or, if he had cause to think that he had to deal with a churl, he might throw it in his face—as I do now."

A buzz of excitement went up from the knot of squires as Alleyn's gentle manner turned by this senseless attack into fiery retribution, dashed his glove with all his strength into the sneering face of his antagonist.

"Your life for this!" said the bully, with a face which was distorted with rage.

"If you can take it," returned Alleyn. "Good lad!" whispered Ford. "Stick to it close as wax."

"I shall see justice," cried Norbury. Sir Oliver's silent attendant.

"You brought it upon yourself, John Tranter," said the tall squire, who had been addressed as Roger Harcomb. "You must ever plague the newcomers. But it scores a shame if this went further. The lad hath shown a proper spirit."

"But a blow! a blow!" cried several of the squires. "There must be a finish to this."

"Nay; Tranter first laid hand upon his head," said Harcomb. "How say you, Tranter? The matter may rest where it stands."

"My name is known in these parts," said Tranter proudly. "I can let pass what might leave a stain upon another. Let him pick up his glove and say that he has done amiss."

"I would see him in the claws of the devil first," whispered Ford.

"You hear, young sir?" said the peace-maker. "Our friend will overlook the matter if you do but say that you have acted in heat and haste."

"I came here at the beck of my master," answered Alleyn. "and I looked on every man here as an Englishman and a friend. This gentleman hath shown me a rough welcome, and if I have answered him in the same spirit he has but himself to thank. I will pick the glove up, but, certes, I shall abide by what I have done unless he first crave my pardon for what he hath said and done."

Tranter shrugged his shoulders. "You have done what you could to save him, Harcomb," he said. "We had best settle it by once."

"So say I," cried Alleyn.

might catch his foeman's blade, and by a quick turn of his wrist snap it across. Alleyn, on the other hand, must trust for his defence to his quick eye and active foot—for his sword, though keen, was of a light and graceful build, with a narrow sloping pommel and a tapering steel.

Tranter well knew his advantage and lost little time in putting it to use. As his opponent walked toward him he suddenly bounded forward and sent in a whistling cut which would have severed the other in twain had he not sprung lightly back from it. Quick as a panther, Alleyn sprang in with a thrust, but Tranter, who was as active as he was strong, had already recovered himself and turned it aside with a movement of his heavy blade. Again he whizzed in a blow which made the spectators hold their breath, and again Alleyn very quickly and swiftly sid from under it, and sent back two lightning thrusts which the other could scarce parry. So close were they to each other that Alleyn had no time to spring back from the next cut, which beat down his sword and grazed his forehead, sending the blood streaming into his eyes and down his cheeks. He sprang out beyond sword-sweep, and the pair stood breathing heavily, while the crowd of young squires buzzed their applause.

"Heavily struck on both sides!" cried Roger Harcomb. "You have both won honor from this meeting, and it would be a shame to let it go further. You have done enough," cried Norbury.

"You have carried yourself well," cried several of the older squires.

"For my part, I have no wish to slay this young man," said Tranter, wiping his forehead.

"Does this gentleman crave my pardon for having used me despitely?" asked Alleyn.

"Nay, not I."

"Then stand on your guard, sir!" With a clatter and clash the two blades met once more. Alleyn pressing in so as to keep within full sweep of the heavy blade, while Tranter as continually sprang back to have space for one of his great cuts. A three-parts parried blow drew blood from Alleyn's left shoulder, but at the same moment he wounded Tranter slightly upon the thigh. Next instant, however, his blade had slipped into the fatal notch, and there was a sharp cracking sound as a tinkling upon the ground, and he found splintered pieces of steel fifteen inches long was all that remained to him of his weapon.

"Your life is in my hands!" cried Tranter, with a bitter smile.

"Another sword," cried Ford.

"Nay, sir," said Harcomb, "that is not the custom."

"Throw down your hilt, Edricson!" cried Norbury.

"Never!" said Alleyn. "Do you crave my pardon, sir?"

"You are mad to ask it."

"Then on your guard again!" cried the young squire, and sprang in with a fire and a fury which instant made up for the shortness of his weapon. It had not escaped him that his opponent was breathing in short, hoarse gasps, like a man who is dizzy with fatigue. Now was the time for the parer living and the sword agile limb to show their value. Back and back gave Tranter, ever seeking time for a last cut. On and on came Alleyn, his jagged point now at his foe's man's face, now at his throat, now at his chest, still standing and thrusting to pass the line of steel which covered him. Yet his experienced foeman knew well that such efforts could not be long sustained. Let him relax for one instant and his death-blow had come. Relax he must! Flesh and blood could not stand the strain. Already the thrusts were less fierce, the foot less ready, although there was no abatement of the spirit in the steady gray eyes. Tranter, cunning and wary from years of fighting, knew that his chance had come. He brushed aside the frail weapon which was opposed to him, whirled up his great blade, sprang back to get the latter sweep—and vanished into the waters of the Garonne.

So intent had the squires, both combatants and spectators, been on the matter in hand, that all thought of the stamp and swish of the stream had gone from their minds. Tranter's last spring, carried him clear of the edge, and he

praise which broke from the squires around him.

"I am much beholden to you, sir," said Tranter, though in no very friendly voice. "Certes, I should have been in the river now but for you."

"I ask no thanks," Alleyn answered shortly. "Give me your hand to rise, Ford."

"The river has been my enemy," said Tranter, "but it hath been a good friend to you, for it hath saved your life this day."

"That is as it may be," returned Alleyn.

"Alas, for my poor sword, which lies at the bottom of the Garonne!" said Tranter.

"Here is your pourpoint, Edricson," cried Norbury. "Throw it over your shoulders, that you may have at least one dry garment."

"And now away back to the abbey," said several.

"One moment, sirs!" cried Alleyn, who was leaning on Ford's shoulder, with the broken sword, which he had picked up, still clutched in his right hand. "My ears may be somewhat dulled by the water, but I have not yet heard this gentleman crave pardon for the insult which he put upon me in the hall."

"What! do you still pursue the quarrel?" asked Tranter.

"And why not, sir? I am slow to take up such things, but once afoot I shall follow it while I have life or breath."

"Ma foi, you have not too much of either, for you are as white as marble," said Harcomb bluntly. "Let it drop, sir, for you have come very well out of it."

"Nay," said Alleyn, "this quarrel is none of my making, but, now I am here, I swear that I shall never leave this spot until I have that which I have come for: so ask my pardon, sir, or choose another giftive and to it again."

"The young squire was deadly white from his exertions, both on the land and in the water. Soaking and stained, with a smear of blood on his white shoulder, and another on his brow, there was still in his whole pose and set face the stamp of an inflexible resolution. His opponent's duller and more material mind quailed before the fire and intensity of a higher spiritual nature."

"I had not thought that you had taken it so amiss," said he awkwardly. "It was but such a jest as we play upon each other, and, if you must have it so, I am sorry for it."

"Then I am sorry too," quoth Alleyn warmly. "and here is my hand upon it."

"And the non-meat horn has blown three times," quoth Harcomb. "By my troth! Master Ford, your friend here is in need of a cup of wine, for he hath drunk deeply of Garonne water. I had not thought from his fair face that he had stood to this matter so shrewdly."

"Faith," said Ford, "this air of Bordeaux hath turned our turtle-dove into game-cock. A milder or more courteous youth never came out of Hampshire."

"His master also, as I understand, is a very gentle and courteous gentleman," remarked Harcomb. "Yet I do not think that they are either of them men with whom it is very safe to trifle."

(To be Continued Next Week.)

### Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

The scenes of the story are laid in the 14th century. Herold, John of the Clarence Monastery, one of the Abbot of Beaulieu, guilty of certain serious charges brought against him for a number of the monks. Another of the lay brethren, Alleyn Edricson, takes his departure in accordance with his father's will, designating that for should, he becomes a knight, he go forth for one year to choose for himself his future calling. In each case he goes to visit his brother, the Norman of Mincot, whose reputation is unknown. At night Alleyn takes a room at the house where he meets his brother in Mincot, a quarrel with a beautiful damsel. He reacts her, thereby gaining the Norman's country. The following morning he intends to join his companions at Christchurch, where he meets his brother, who is laughing without telling him her name. Hereupon his companions and they journey to Sir Nigel's home. On seeing the Norman's countenance, Herold John is much vexed at his apparent bodily weakness but quickly changes his mind when they have an adventure with a huge bear. Here Alleyn meets his companion of the woods, who he meets the daughter of Sir Nigel. The White Company leaves Twynham Castle. Alleyn tells the Lady Maud that he loves her, she bids him be patient, but leaves him a green suit to carry with him to the next a love token. The White Company and Sir Oliver Buttesham embark for the French coast and fall in with two Spanish private ships which they encounter. The knights teach the French shore in safety and prepare for an audience with the Black Prince of England.

A strong decoction of common poke root, mixed with an equal quantity of black molasses, boiled to a syrup, and spread upon bread, is sure and sudden death to cockroaches. They eat it greedily and die.

### DIPLOMAT'S WIFE MEDDLING.

#### Ambitious American Woman Interfered in Affairs of State.

The ambitions of Mrs. Bellamy Storer for the promotion of her husband, formerly United States ambassador to Austria-Hungary, are now blamed for his removal from the diplomatic service of the United States. It is claimed that Mrs. Storer's ambition was so intense that she not only tried to bring pressure to bear on the President for the advancement of her husband, but that her personal desire to have another American cardinal become objectionable. She advocated Archbishop Ireland for the position, and asked President Roosevelt to use his influence in the archbishop's behalf in Rome.

President Roosevelt wrote in reply that he would like to see the archbishop of St. Paul a cardinal and spoke very highly of the archbishop's public services and breadth of view, but he declared he could not become involved in any matter of church politics, and he pointed out to Mrs. Storer how improper it would be for him to advocate the selection by the Pope of any person for any place.

Mrs. Storer, it is averred, made use of the expression of the President that he would like to see the archbishop made a cardinal, and caused it to come to the attention of high dignitaries in such a way that it appeared to be the wish of the President that the action should be taken.

President Roosevelt wrote to Vienna expostulating, and calling attention to his original note, in which he said he would like to have Archbishop Ireland elevated, but could not meddle in such affairs, and he pointed out that the qualification had not been made use of in connection with the apparent endorsement of the proposed new cardinal. Other questions arose, and the administration found itself embarrassed in other ways, and the final result was that the connection of Mrs. Storer with the diplomatic service ceased.

The Emperor of the British Empire has 54,000,000 white subjects. The remainder are black, brown and yellow.

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"THE PRINCE OBSERVED THEIR ENTRANCE WITH ALIGHT OF WELCOME IN HIS EYES."

that perchance there is a little less noise there."

"And why less noise, young Solomon?"

"Ah! this is for you to discover."

"Pardieu! here is a paladin come over, with the Hampshire mud still sticking to his shoes. I means that the noise is less for our being out of the country."

"How do we take this, sir?" asked the ruffling squire.

"You may take it as it comes," said Ford carelessly.

"Stint it, Humphrey," said a tall squire with a burst of laughter. "You will have little credit from this gentleman. I perceive. Tongues are sharp in Hampshire, sir."

"And swords?"

"Hum! we may prove that. In two days' time is my repress due, and you may see if your lance is as quick as your wit."

"All very well, Roger Harcomb," cried a burly, bull-necked young man, whose square shoulders and massive build told of exceptional personal strength. "You pass too lightly over the matter. We are not to be so easily overpowered. The Lord Lovine hath given his promise, but we know nothing of his squire, save that one of them hath a calling tongue. And Lovine of you, young sir?"

"Ma foi! this is my lady's name come over. Your cheek will be browner and your hand harder ere you see your mother again."

Close to the bank of the Garonne there lay a little tract of green-sward. The river ran deep and swift up to low stage here. Here the two combatants drew their swords. In such combats, as well as in the formal sports of the tilting-yard, Tranter had won a name for strength and dexterity. On the other hand, Alleyn had used his weapons in constant exercise and practice for every day for many months, and being by nature quick of eye and prompt of hand, he might pass now as no mean swordsman. An unequal fight it seemed to most; but there were a few, and they the most experienced, who saw something in the youth's steady gray eye and wary step which left the issue open.

"Hold, sirs, hold!" cried Norbury, ere blow had been struck. "This gentleman hath a two-handed sword, a good foot longer than that of our friend."

"Take mine, Alleyn!" said Ford.

"Nay, friends," he answered. "I understand the weight and balance of mine own. To work, sir, for our lords may need us!"

Tranter's great sword was indeed a mighty venture in his favor. The weapon he held straight up in front of him—with blade erect, so that he might either bring it down with a swinging blow, or by a turn of the heavy blade he might guard his own head and body. A further protection lay in the broad and powerful guard which crossed the hilt, and which was furnished with a deep and narrow notch, in which an expert swordsman

found himself in an instant eight feet deep in the ice-cold stream. Once and twice his gasping face and clutching fingers broke up through the green water, sweeping outward in the swirl of the current. Alleyn had dropped his shattered sword and was standing, trembling in every limb, with his rage all changed in an instant to pity. For the third time the drowning man came to the surface, his eyes turned in despair to the shore, in an instant Alleyn, on his side in the Garonne, striking out with powerful strokes for his late foe.

Yet the current was swift and strong, and good swimmer as he was, it was no easy task which Alleyn had set himself. To clutch at Tranter and to seize him by the hair was the work of a few seconds, but to hold his head above water and to make his way out of the current was another matter. Then at last, amid a shout of joy and praise from the bank, they slowly drew clear into more stagnant water, at the instant that a rope, made of a dozen swordbelts linked together by the buckles, was thrown by Ford into their hands. Three pulls from eager arms, and the two combatants, dripping and pale, were dragged up the bank, and lay panting upon the grass.

John Tranter was the first to come to himself. He had done nothing during the fierce battle with the current. He staggered to his feet and looked down upon his rescuer, who had raised himself upon his elbow and was smiling faintly at the buzz of congratulations and of

## What Does This Mean?

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