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The White Company

Arthur Conan Doyle · *1891 · original English text*

In 1366 a young man, Alleyne Edricson, leaves his monastery in Hampshire at his father's will and goes out into the world. He soon makes friends with the giant Hordle John and the archer Samkin Aylward, and joins Sir Nigel Loring's band of bowmen, the White Company, in the wars of France and Spain. Doyle's medieval adventure is full of tournaments, ambushes, a sea fight, and a love story.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does a quiet scholar owe to the world of action, and what does the world of action owe to a better idea of honor?

Alleyne enters the world unfitted for war and learns the bowman's trade without losing his gentleness. Hordle John, once a monk himself, proves a brave and kind man. Sir Nigel is the model of courtly honor, and the company's success owes as much to his courtesy as to his strength. Doyle's view is warm: a knight's code, at its best, is a practical moral habit.

KEY CHARACTERS

Alleyne Edricson
A young, gentle scholar who leaves the monastery for the world.

Hordle John
A giant ex-monk who becomes Alleyne's friend.

Samkin Aylward
A skilled archer and a merry companion.

Sir Nigel Loring
A small, courageous knight.

Lady Maude Loring
Sir Nigel's daughter.

Lady Tiphaine
A lady whose second sight appears in the story.

Grades 7–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Out of the Abbey

CHAPTERS I–VII

Alleyne is sent out of Beaulieu Abbey. He meets the giant Hordle John, sees the archers' way of life, and travels with new friends toward Castle Twynham.

- Alleyne's innocence of the world is the comic point.
- Hordle John's strength is matched by a certain delicacy.
- Samkin Aylward is the model archer.

02

In the Forest and at the Castle

CHAPTERS VIII–XII

Strange things happen in Minstead Wood. Alleyne comes into Sir Nigel Loring's circle, learns more than he can teach, and the White Company is raised for the wars.

- Alleyne is out of his depth and learns fast.
- Hordle John finds a man to follow.
- Alleyne learns more than he can teach.

03

To the Wars by Sea

CHAPTERS XIII–XVII

The White Company sets out from Lepe in the Yellow Cog and fights two rover galleys. The voyage continues to the Gironde.

- The fight with the rover galleys is a vivid set piece.
- Sir Nigel's wayside ventures mark his character.
- The sea passage brings the company to France.

04

Bordeaux and the Lists

CHAPTERS XVIII–XXVI

In Bordeaux Alleyne wins his place in an honorable guild, the company holds a tournament, and England's knights face a champion. A treasure is found.

- Sir Nigel puts a patch on his eye as a vow.
- The bowmen carouse at the Rose de Guienne.
- The lists are the book's best pageant.

05

Over the Pyrenees

CHAPTERS XXVII–XXXVI

The company crosses into Spain with the army, stands a siege at Villefranche, and fights in Navarre. Sir Nigel hawks at an eagle and removes his patch.

- Five men hold the keep of Villefranche.
- The passage of Roncesvalles is an epic movement.
- Sir Nigel keeps his vow with a joke and a bow.

06

Home to Hampshire

CHAPTERS XXXVII–XXXVIII

The company is disbanded, and the survivors return home to Hampshire.

- Alleyne's love story is resolved.
- Sir Nigel's house is at peace.
- The ending turns toward home and family.

Chivalry · Comradeship · War · Growing Up

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 7–12

1. Alleyne comes from a monastery and goes out into war. Watch how his learning is used.
2. The three friends are very different. Ask what each brings to the company.
3. Sir Nigel's oddities are comic. See how Doyle makes them admirable too.
4. The longbow is the weapon of the story. Notice how Doyle describes the archers' skill.

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