

A GENTLEMAN-AT-ARMS

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*SUDDENLY THERE WAS A ROAR OF MUSKETS, AND THROUGH
THE SMOKE I SAW THE SPANIARDS RUSHING TOWARDS US*

A GENTLEMAN-AT-ARMS:

BEING PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF
SIR CHRISTOPHER RUDD, KNIGHT,
AS RELATED BY HIMSELF IN THE
YEAR 1641 AND NOW SET FORTH BY

HERBERT STRANG

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CYRUS CUNEO
AND T. H. ROBINSON

LONDON
HENRY FROWDE
HODDER & STOUGHTON

[image]

Title page

First printed in 1914

CONTENTS

[INTRODUCTORY](#)

THE FIRST PART

CHRISTOPHER RUDD'S ADVENTURE IN HISPANIOLA, AND THE STRANGE STORY OF CAPTAIN Q

THE SECOND PART

CHRISTOPHER RUDD'S ADVENTURE IN FRANCE, AND HIS BORROWING OF THE WHITE PLUME OF HENRY OF NAVARRE

THE THIRD PART

CHRISTOPHER RUDD'S ADVENTURE IN THE LOW COUNTRIES, AND HIS QUAINT DEVICE OF THE SILVER SHOT

THE FOURTH PART

CHRISTOPHER RUDD'S ADVENTURE IN SPAIN, AND THE FASHION IN WHICH HE PLAYED THE PART OF A PHYSICIAN

THE FIFTH PART

CHRISTOPHER RUDD'S ADVENTURE IN IRELAND, AND THE MANNER OF HIS WINNING A WIFE

POSTSCRIPT

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

COLOUR PLATES BY CYRUS CUNEO

SUDDENLY THERE WAS A ROAR OF MUSKETS, AND THROUGH THE SMOKE
I SAW THE SPANIARDS RUSHING TOWARDS US (see p. 52) . . . *Frontispiece*

I BEHELD THE MAN KNEELING BEFORE AN OPEN CHEST, GLOATING OVER
IT, PLUNGING HIS HANDS INTO IT

THE SIEUR DE LANGRES GAVE ONE CHOKING SIGH, AND FELL AT THE
KING'S FEET

RAISING HIS SWORD HIGH ABOVE HIS HEAD, HE BROUGHT IT DOWN
WITH A VEHEMENT STROKE

PINNING HIM DOWN UPON A CHAIR, I BADE HIM STERNLY GIVE HEED
TO CERTAIN CONDITIONS ON WHICH I WOULD SPARE HIS LIFE

DOWN HE WENT UPON THE COBBLES, AND I STOOD OVER HIM WHILE
HE LAY AND GROANED

INSTANTLY RAOUL WAS AT DON YGNACIO'S THROAT

I FOUND MY LADY KNEELING BESIDE ME, HOLDING A CUP

DRAWINGS BY T. H. ROBINSON

I LAY HID UNTIL THE MAN HAD COME FORTH AND GONE HIS WAY

HE CAUGHT THE SWIMMER AS HE WAS ON THE POINT OF SINKING

THE SPANIARDS LEAPT INTO THE RAVINE AND CLAMBERED UP THE
OTHER SIDE

THE SWIFTNESS OF OUR ONSET TOOK THE SPANIARDS ALL ABACK

WE OPENED THE CHESTS IN HIS PRESENCE

I FELT A SHARP PANG IN THE CALF OF MY LEFT LEG

A FIGURE SPRANG AT ME OUT OF THE DARK ENTRY

I SAW A MAN LYING IN A HUDDLED HEAP

WE CREPT SOFTLY AS FOXES TOWARD THE WALL

”SIR, YOU COME FROM THE ILLUSTRIOUS PRINCE MAURICE OF NASSAU?”

RIGHT MERRY WERE THE CITIZENS AT THE SUCCESS OF OUR ENTERPRISE

VOLMAR READ THE LETTER BY THE AID OF A LANTERN

I BEHELD THREE MEN AS BLACK BLOTS MOVING IN THE DARKNESS

”TO-MORROW THE ORDER WILL BE GIVEN TO THE CAPTAIN OF THE
GUARD TO ARREST YOU”

I TOLD HIM VERY SHORTLY, AND NEVER IN MY LIFE HAVE I SEEN SO
PITEOUS A SPECTACLE AS THAT LITTLE ROUND RUBICUND MAN

I FOUND SIR WALTER IN HIS GARDEN

HE THRUST INTO MY HAND SOME PAPERS

I MADE BOLD TO ACCOST HIM

I BETOOK MYSELF TO AN APOTHECARY’S

”OUT OF MY SIGHT, RAPSCALLION!”

SHOWING HIM MY DAGGER, I BADE HIM HOLD HIS PEACE

HE PLIED THE WHIP RIGHT MERRILY

THEY DID BUT MOCK ME WITH JEERS AND HORRID EXECRATIONS

”I WILL SURELY EXECUTE UPON YOU ANY VIOLENCE OR INDIGNITY THAT
MY FATHER MAY SUFFER”

GATHERING MY SPEED, IN FOUR LEAPS I WAS UPON HIM

HE CLUTCHED ME BY THE ARM AND POINTED TO A REGIMENT OF DUSKY

SHAPES

I CROSSED THE GUARD OF RORY MAC SHANE, AND GAVE HIM THE POINT
OF MY SWORD

”HOW NOW, MY BULLY ROOK!”

HEADINGS ON PAGES . . . 17, 81, 129, 217, 311

TAILPIECES ON PAGES . . . 75, 123, 209, 304, 382

INTRODUCTORY

The Rudds, like many another ancient family, have come down in the world, as the saying goes. They no longer live on the toil of others, but work for their own livelihood. They no longer own manors, or follow their feudal lords to court in armour; but here and there about the world, in business, at the Bar, in the Army or administrative offices, they worthily sustain the honour of their name.

The present head of the family cherishes an heirloom, which has descended from father to son through three centuries. It has no commercial value; it would not fetch a shilling in the auction room: indeed, the mere hint of selling it would shock a Rudd. It is a flat leather case, discoloured, frayed at the edges, almost worn out with age. But upon its side may still be seen faint traces of the initials C.R., and within it lies a bundle of faded papers, with the following inscription on the cover:

Certeyn Passages in the Life of Syr Christopher Ruddle, knyghte, related by himselfe in the yeare of our Lorde 1641, and written down by his grandsonne Stephen.

It is easy to understand why this old manuscript is treasured by the Rudd family. The ”certain passages” in their ancestor’s life are interesting in themselves, as narratives of romantic adventure in various countries of the old world and the new. They give incidental pictures of remarkable scenes and personages, and

throw not a little light on the manners and conditions of bygone times. Above all, they seem to me to portray an English gentleman of the great age of Elizabeth—a gentleman who had a proper pride in his country without scorning others, and was ever ready to draw his sword chivalrously in the cause of freedom and justice.

The grandson, Stephen Rudd, professes to have written these stories as they were told him by his grandfather; but I cannot help suspecting that he dealt with them somewhat as the parliamentary reporters of the present day are said to deal with the speeches delivered on the floor of the House—arranging, giving form and coherence. You can detect in the style echoes of the prose of Elizabeth's day, but it is on the whole less coloured, less vigorous, more formal, in the manner of the Caroline writers; and it has not the unconstraint of a man talking at ease in his armchair. The events related are separated by wide intervals of time, and Stephen has filled up the gaps with brief accounts of the course of public affairs, as well as of the personal history of his grandfather. In printing these along with Sir Christopher's stories, I have thought it best, for the sake of uniformity, to modernise the spelling: there would be no object in perplexing the reader with such antique forms, for instance, as *beesyde*, *woordes* and *tunge*.

Sir Christopher's first story plunges at once into an adventure of his seventeenth year, and it is perhaps advisable to preface it with a few particulars of his earlier life. He was born, it appears, on July 15, 1571, the son of a country gentleman who owned a manor on the outskirts of the New Forest. This was the year of the discovery of the Norfolk plot against the life of Queen Elizabeth, and the opening of a period of great moment in the history of England and Europe. The boy was six years old when Drake set sail on his famous voyage to the Pacific; and during the next few years he must have heard many stirring events talked about in his father's hall—Alva's persecutions in the Netherlands, the assassination of the Prince of Orange, the buccaneering exploits of the English sea-dogs. At the age of twelve he entered William of Wykeham's great school at Winchester, and we may imagine how eagerly he discussed with his school fellows such items of exciting news as filtered through from the greater world. It is not surprising that his imagination was fired, that the lust of adventure gripped him, and that at last the call proved irresistible, bringing his schooldays to an abrupt end, and luring him forth to a career of activity and enterprise.

HERBERT STRANG

THE FIRST PART

CHRISTOPHER RUDD'S ADVENTURE IN HISPANIOLA, AND THE STRANGE STORY OF CAPTAIN Q.

[image]

headpiece to First Part

I

I was a lank youth of sixteen years when I fell into the hands of the Spaniards of Hispaniola—an accident wherein my grandam saw the hand of Providence chastising a prodigal son; but of that you shall judge.

In the summer of the year 1587, riding from school home by way of Southampton, I was told there of a brigantine then fitting out, to convey forth a company of gentlemen adventurers to the Spanish Main in quest of treasure. Sir Francis Drake had lately come home from spoiling the Spaniards' ships in the harbour of Cadiz, and the ports of our south coast were ringing with the tale of his wondrous doings; and I, being known for a lad of quick blood and gamesome temper, was resolved to go where Francis Drake had gone aforetime, and gain somewhat of the wealth then lying open to adventurers bold to pluck the King of Spain's beard. Wherefore one fine night I stole from my bed-chamber, hied me to the quay at Southampton, and bestowed myself secretly aboard the good ship *Elizabeth*.

Of my discovery in the hold, and the cuffs I got, and the probation I was put to, and my admission thereafter to the company of gentlemen adventurers, I will say nothing. The *Elizabeth* made in due time the coast of Hispaniola, and

when Hilary Rawdon, the captain, sent a party of his crew ashore to fill their water-casks, I must needs accompany them; 'twas the first land we had touched for two weary months, and I felt a desperate urgency to stretch my legs. And while we were about our business, up comes a posse of Spaniards swiftly out of the woods, and there is a sudden onfall and a sharp tussle, and our party, being outnumbered three to one, is sore discomfited and utterly put to the rout, but not until all save myself and another are slain, and I find myself on my back, with a Spanish bullet in my leg. And you see me now borne away among the victors, and when I am healed of my wound, I learn that I am a slave on the lands of a most noble hidalgo of Spain, one Don Alfonso de Silva de Marabona, and an admiral to boot.

Now I had left home to spoil the Spaniards and with no other intent; wherefore to toil and sweat under a hot sun on the fields of a Spanish admiral, however noble, was no whit to my liking. Moreover, Don Alfonso proved an exceeding hard taskmaster, and bore heavily upon me his prisoner, a thing that was perhaps no cause for wonder, seeing that of all who had suffered when Master Drake sacked San Domingo, he had suffered the most. His mansion had been plundered and burnt; his pride had been wounded by the despite done to his galleons; and when a Spaniard is hurt both in pride and in pocket, he is not like to prove himself a very generous foe. And so I was in a manner the scapegoat for Master Drake's offences, and had in good sooth to smart for it. My noble master made no ado about commanding me to be flogged if he were not content with me; and to rub the juice of lemons, laced with salt and pepper, into the wounds made by the lash, is a marvellous shrewd way (though nowise commendable) of fostering penitence and remorse.

But in this unhappy plight I was not left without a friend. One midday, when I was resting from my toil in the fields, there came to me a spare and sallow boy, somewhat younger than myself, and spoke courteously to me in a kind of French, the which I, being by no means without my rudiments, made shift to understand. I soon perceived that we had a something in common, namely, a heavy and grievous grudge against Don Alfonso de Silva de Marabona, the which became a bond of unity betwixt us. Antonio (so was he named) was nephew to the admiral, and dependent on him—though his father had been a rich man,—by him, moreover, treated with great rigour. Ere long I was well acquainted with Antonio's doleful case. It was eleven years since his father the elder Antonio had sailed away for Spain, being summoned thither about some question of law concerning his estates in Castile. He took with him, in the galleon *San Felipe*, a store of treasure belonging to his brother the admiral, together with a yet costlier freight for behoof of his Catholic Majesty of Spain. And there was Antonio, a motherless infant of four years, left in his uncle's charge, his father purposing to

return for him in the following summer, by the which time he hoped to have set his affairs in order.

The stormy season of the year was at hand when he departed, and divers of his friends had warned him against the perils of the long voyage. But Don Antonio feared the elements less than the French and English rovers who then infested the seas, and he had indeed chosen this time advisedly, for that it was little likely to tempt the pirates from their lairs. It fell out, however, that he had not left port above three days when a great tempest arose, suddenly, as the manner is in those regions, and to the wonted terrors of the tornado was added an earthquake, with fierce rumblings and vast upheavals of the soil, so that the admiral made great lament about his brother and the wealth he had in charge. Don Antonio came no more to Hispaniola; the galleon *San Felipe* was heard of never more; and his son had remained under the austere governance of Don Alfonso, who showed him no kindness, but ever seemed to look upon him as a burthen. When Antonio came to the age of twelve, he inquired of his uncle whether the estates of his late father would not one day be his; but the admiral made answer that he had long since purchased the property from his brother, who had purposed sometime to quit the island and spend the remnant of his days in Spain.

Such was Antonio's story, as he told it to me. He called his uncle a fiend; as for me, I called him, in the English manner, Old Marrow-bones; we both signified one and the same thing—that we held him in loathing and abhorrence. This was our bond of union, and soon it became our custom to meet daily and rehearse our woes in consort. Antonio was ever careful to keep these our meetings secret, since he knew that, coming perchance to the admiral's ears, they would be deemed a cause of offence, and be punished, beyond doubt, with many stripes.

But to dub your enemy with opprobrious names brings you no contentment, and does him no hurt. In no great while I began to consider of some means whereby I might contrive to slip the leash of my illustrious master. Having made Antonio swear by all his saints that he would not betray me, I took counsel with him; indeed, I essayed to persuade the boy to put all to the hazard, and make his escape with me. But Antonio could not screw his resolution to this pitch. He was content to throw himself with right good-will into the perfecting of my plans. And so it came to pass that one fine day, about sunset, I took French leave (as the saying is) and set off on my lonely way to liberty. I had nothing upon me save my garments, and a long machete (so their knives are called) given me by Antonio; but as Samson slew countless Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, and David laid Goliath low with a pebble from the brook; so I, though I did not liken myself to those heroes of old, yet knew myself to be a fellow-countryman with Francis Drake, and needed no doughtier ensample to inspire me.

Following Antonio's wise and prudent counsel I set my face towards the north-west angle of the island, for the reason that, parted from it by only a narrow strip of sea, there lay the smaller island of Tortuga, where it was possible that some countrymen of my own might be. Tortuga had been at some time a settlement of the Spaniards, but they had now abandoned it, and if an English ship should chance to have put in to water there, or to burn the barnacles off its hull, I might light upon the crew and join myself to them, and so bring my tribulations to an end. And after near a week's trudging—with herbs for my meat and water from the streams for my drink—I came one day to the further shore of Hispaniola, and with great gladness beheld the strange hump-backed island, like a monstrous tortoise floating on the sea, for which cause it was named Tortuga.

A day or two I spent in roaming to and fro, gazing hungrily seawards for a ship. And when none appeared, I bethought me that I should certainly be none the worse conditioned—nay, I might be a great deal the better—if I should cross to the smaller island and there make my abode. Having once been the habitation of Christian folk, methought it would retain some remnants of its former plantations, so that I need not want for food; and of a surety, with a wider expanse of sea before me, I should be in better case to spy a passing vessel than if I remained on Hispaniola. I was minded at first to swim the channel—'twould be no great feat—but, observing at the water's edge a pair of ground-sharks lying in wait for a toothsome meal, I gave up this design very readily, and considered of some safer way.

There were woods growing almost to the shore. To a boy with his mind set on it, and a sharp knife to his hand, the making of a raft is a task of no great labour or hardship. 'Twas the work of two days to lop branches meet for my purpose, strip them, and bind them together with strands of bejuca, a climbing plant of serviceable sort; and on the third day I launched my raft, and oared myself across the still water, being accompanied by a disappointed shark the better part of the way. I went ashore in some fear and trembling lest I should meet Spaniards, or other hostile men; but I saw no sign of present habitation, and wandered for near a day without lighting on any traces of mankind. But at length in my course I spied a heap of wood ashes, and some rinds of fruit, and a little beyond a broken hen-coop, whereby I knew that men sometimes resorted to the island, as Antonio had said. It came into my mind that my late companions of the *Elizabeth* had perchance set foot here no long while before me, and I felt a great longing to look on them again. I wondered where they might be, whether they had fought the Spaniards on the Main and gained great treasure, or whether they had given up their quest and sailed away for home.

Some days I spent in solitude, never straying far from the coast, lest I should be out of sight if a ship came near. There was food in plenty—such is the bounty

of Providence in those climes; and of nights I ensconced myself in a little hut I built of branches in a nook on the shore.

One evening as I roamed upon the cliff, and with vain longing scanned the sea, on a sudden I espied, moving among the tree trunks on my right hand, a patch of red. In great perturbation of spirit I sprang behind a tree. I had not seen clearly what the object was: it might be a man, it might be a beast. In the wildernesses about the middle of Hispaniola there were, I knew, herds of wild dogs and boars, a terror to human kind; and a fear beset me lest Tortuga also were the haunt of savage creatures, which might come upon me in the night. Meseemed I must at the least resolve my doubts, wherefore I went forward stealthily, bending among creeping plants, skipping from trunk to trunk, straining my eyes for another glimpse of that patch of red. For some little while I sought in vain, and I was in a sweat of apprehension lest I should stumble into danger; but after stalking for near half-an-hour, as I supposed, of a sudden I saw some moving thing among the trees within a hundred paces of me. Even as I watched, a quaint and marvellous figure came forth into a little open space—the form of a man, arrayed from doublet to shoes in garments of bright red. His head was bare; a rapier hung at his side; and as I looked he plucked the weapon by the hilts, and made sundry passes in the air, going from me slowly into the woodland. Never in my life had I beheld a man so oddly apparelled, and to find such an one here, on this lone island of Tortuga, set me athrill with admiration. I deemed that I should have no security of mind until I had learnt somewhat of this stranger, and whether there were others with him; wherefore with stealthy steps I followed him into the woodland, and there, after near losing him, I saw him enter a little hut set in the midst of a narrow laund. From behind a tree I watched the red man. He kindled a fire, and I looked for him to cook his supper; but instead, he laid himself down on a bed of dried grass, so that the smoke from the fire might be carried by the light wind across him, the which in a moment I guessed to be his device for warding off the insects; I had suffered many things from their appetite in the nights I had slept in the woods of Hispaniola.

Seeing that the red man had composed himself to sleep, I returned quietly to my hut on the shore, and when I fell asleep dreamed that I beheld him defending at the rapier's point young Antonio against the whip of the noble admiral Don Alfonso de Silva de Marabona. I rose with the sun and stole back to the woodland, in hope to see the man quit his sleeping-place and to gain some light upon his manner of life and his doings upon this lone island. But the hut was empty; its inhabitant was already astir. Not that day nor for several days after did I set eyes on him again; but one high noon I had a glimpse of him roaming along the cliff, and while I was following, a great way off, he suddenly vanished from my sight as 'twere into the earth.

The numbness of terror seized upon me; I stood fixed to the ground, never doubting (being then but a boy) that 'twas the foul fiend in his very person who had descended into the bowels of the earth. But bethinking me that I had discerned no horns upon his head, nor the tail that was his proper appendage, but, instead, a rapier such as mortal men use, I plucked up heart to draw nigh to the spot where he had disappeared. And when I came to it, 'twas not, as I feared, a chasm, horrid with blue flame and sulphurous fume, but a short, steep path in the cliff-side.

Gathering my courage, I trod with wary steps until I came to a small opening in the cliff. And when I had overcome my tearfulness and ventured to peep in, I was struck with a great amazement, for I beheld a vast vaulted chamber. There came some little daylight into it through fissures in its further wall, and when my eyes had grown accustomed to the twilight, and comprehended the whole space, I saw there, before and below me, the hull of a galleon, lying somewhat upon its side, with a little water about its keel. And as I looked, I beheld the red man how he waded to the vessel, whose side he ascended by a ladder of rope, and then, having gained the deck, he was no more to be seen.

I stood rooted in amazement. I durst not follow the red man further, conceiving that in a land where all save Spaniards were intruders, the odds were that he was of that race, and that to accost him, even to discover myself to him, might put my life in jeopardy. Besides, the man's aspect, and my remembrance of the fierceness of his sword-play as I saw it in my dream, counselled wariness: he was not a man to approach but with caution. Moreover, I was in presence of a great marvel, perceiving no means whereby the galleon had come into this vault. Save for the narrow entrance, and the jagged rents in the walls, the chamber was wholly enclosed; nor was there any passage whereby so great a vessel could have been hauled in from the sea.

Perplexed and bewildered, I waited long, but vainly, for the red man to show himself again. Then, when from sheer weariness and hunger I was in a mind to return to the cliff, I beheld him rise from below deck, descend by the ladder, and, again wading through the water, make towards me. Incontinently and in silence I fled, but halted when I gained the cliff, and lay hid until the man had come forth and gone his way. Whereupon I stole back and descended to the floor of the vault, to quench, if I might, my burning curiosity.

[image]

*I LAY HID UNTIL THE MAN HAD COME FORTH AND GONE HIS
WAY*

I walked about the vessel, and when I came to the stern, I started back, smitten with stark amazement. Her name was painted in great golden letters there; I read it: 'twas SAN FELIPE, the name of the galleon wherein the father of my friend Antonio had sailed from San Domingo eleven years since, and which had never more been heard of.

I thought of witchcraft, and questioned whether 'twere not the very work of the devil, for sure no mortal hands had brought the vessel through solid walls into this rock-bound chamber. But the galleon itself was in truth a thing of substance; thee were real shells at the brink of the water; the water itself (when I dipped my finger and licked it) was salt; beyond doubt the vault had communication with the sea. And even while I stood there I perceived the water to be rising; 'twas deeper now than when the man had first waded through it to the vessel. In haste I made the full circuit of the place, searching for an entrance, but in vain. Save the fissures letting in the light, there was not a hole through which a rat might wriggle, nor could I find the passage by which the water came.

In much perplexity, oppressed by the wonder of it, I left the place by and by and returned to my hut. But I could not long withhold myself from the cavern, the which lured and (in a manner) beckoned me by some strange spell. Next day I came again to it, and did as I had seen the red man do—to wit, waded through the water and climbed on board. My feet had scarce touched the deck when I beheld the red form standing in the narrow entrance at the further end of the vault. Quick as thought I slipped into hiding on the lofty poop and there kept watch. The man came aboard and descended by the companion, and a little after I heard the tinkling of metal. I was drawn as by strong cords to learn what he was doing, and crept silently as a mouse after him to the cabin. As I drew near I heard again the clink of metal, and when I came to the door I beheld the man kneeling before an open chest, gloating over it, plunging his hands into it, bathing them in the pieces of eight that filled it to the brim.

[image]

*I BEHELD THE MAN KNEELING BEFORE AN OPEN CHEST,
GLOATING OVER IT, PLUNGING HIS HANDS INTO IT*

Spellbound, I stood and gazed. This discovery did but deepen the wonder. I questioned whether this were Antonio's father, who had never sailed to Spain at all, but by some strange means, belike with the help of demons, had brought the vessel hither. And then, as I mused, the red man seemed to become aware by some subtle sense that he was not alone. Suddenly he turned his head, espied me,

sprang to his feet, and, whipping out his rapier, leapt with a fierce cry towards me. I turned to flee, being unarmed save for my machete, the which was no match for a rapier. But I was a thought too late. The red man was upon my heels ere I could slip overboard, crying out upon me in words which I was too busy saving my life to heed.

Then began a hot chase round the deck of the galleon, the which might have continued until the pursuer, being the elder, became exhausted, had not I espied, in my running, a half-pike lying over against the bulwarks. This I snatched up, and put myself in a posture of defence. "Voleur! voleur!" cried the red man, glaring at me; and now I had certainty he was no Spaniard. We fought, and doubtless I had fared ill but for my youth and the exercise I had had in this very opposition of pike against sword upon the voyage in the *Elizabeth*. I was but sixteen; the Frenchman wore the grave aspect of a man of fifty; and though he fought as one well practised in the handling of his weapon, 'twas with a stiffness and want of sureness that bespoke disuse.

Yet 'twas a desperate fight. Once and again I came very near to lose my life, and escaped the Frenchman's point solely by my nimbleness. Twice, indeed, the weapon found my flesh; there was blood upon my sleeve. And then came my opportunity. The Frenchman in lunging at me over-reached himself, and I brought my pike down with all my strength upon his arm. His rapier fell to the deck, and before he could recover himself I sprang upon him, and, by a trick of wrestling I had learnt in bouts at our country fairs, threw him upon his back.

And there were we two, he stretched on the deck, I pinning him down, and both of us breathing hard, and gazing each into the other's eyes. Then I spoke in French: what I said I know not; but he smiled, a vacant smile that made me sorry I had hurt him.

"Thou art one of my children," he said. "How didst thou escape?"

By this, and the strangeness of his smile, I knew that his wits were wandering, and deemed it best to humour him.

"Yes, one of your children," I made answer, understanding the word *enfants* as doubtless he intended, as meaning his company, or crew. "You were mistaken, sir; and I hope I have not broken your arm."

"It is bruised, not broken," said the man, lifting it and smiling upon me again. "I do not remember thy name, but thou shalt be my corporal."

"Wherein I am mightily favoured," said I. "Marvellously, too, I have forgotten your name, mon Capitaine."

"My name!" he said, in manifest puzzlement. "My name!" And then, smiling once more, he said, "I cannot tell. It is so long, so long since I heard it. My children called me Captain, but that was before the storm. I forget many things; my children left me; they were reft from me by the storm; they died—all but you;

and I cannot remember your name! They called me Captain; and in truth I am Captain, by the choice and election of the great Condé. Yes, the great Condé made me Captain, a stripling from Quimperlé."

"Captain Q," said I, on the spur of the moment.

He looked puzzled; then the same smile, like the empty smile of a babe, beamed upon his face, and he said—

"Captain Q; and thou shalt be Corporal R. Is it not so?"

"And so it is," I said. "My name is Rudd; I am an Englishman."

"And we will fight the Spaniards together, shall we not? They must never get my gold—never!"

"Indeed they shall not!" I replied. "And now let us go out into the open, and I will bathe your arm at a brook. 'Tis pity we did not remember each other sooner."

"Ah, but it is such a long time!" said Captain Q.

We went out together, and after I had bathed his arm ('twas bruised from elbow to wrist) the Captain invited me to his hut, and to a share of his dinner of herbs.

Such was the strange beginning of a friendship that endured for near forty years. Though he was by so much my elder, he dealt with me as though I had been his brother. We roamed the shore together, together fished and snared animals in the woods, and would have shared the same lodging but that I preferred to keep my little hut on the shore, where I had fresher air and was within close call of any ship that should chance to pass in the night. Little by little I pieced together the story of the rock-girt galleon and of Captain Q. He could not talk in orderly sequence for long together, but whatsoever the subject of our discourse, he would break off to prattle of his childhood in the little village of Quimperlé, and of his youth and manhood to the time when destiny brought him to Tortuga. He was a Huguenot, and had fought under Condé at St. Denis, and under Admiral Coligny at Jarnac. After the dread day of St. Bartholomew he fled from France, and became a corsair in his own vessel, haunting the coasts of the Spanish Main. One day he fell in with the galleon *San Felipe*, and took it after a long fight. His own ship being small, he put his crew aboard the galleon, and the crew and company of the galleon upon his ship, and then sailed away for Tortuga, designing to land there and divide the spoil. And his little vessel, with the Spaniards on board, had gone down before his very eyes, having received sore damage in the action.

Before the *San Felipe* made Tortuga she was caught in a great storm, which swept upon her suddenly and sent her masts by the board. During a lull she was warped into a cove on the Tortuga coast, and there refitted. Then, as she was being towed out, all hands busy in the work, the sea was cast up by a great earthquake; the cliffs on either hand were upheaved and flung sheer upon the

vessel, killing outright every man upon it and in the boats save only the Captain and two or three beside. The Captain was struck on the head by a fragment of rock, and thrown senseless to the deck. (And here, as he told the story, he lifted his long, grizzling locks and showed a great seam upon his skull.) When he came to himself all was at first mere blankness to him. He got upon his feet, lost in amaze to behold the galleon encompassed by a vault of rock, and tended the few men that had survived the cataclysm, but they lingered for a little and then all died, leaving him alone.

Little by little the past came back to him, and he was not aware of any change in himself save that his memory played him tricks. But I perceived that the shock and the blow on the head had done his intellects more harm than he knew. He had long fits of silence, wherein he would sit and gaze vacantly out to sea, or would march with drawn sword into the woodland, seeking an enemy that had come to steal his gold. Other whiles he would weave baskets of grass, humming little songs, or babbling in the manner of children. He never ceased to regard me as one of his whilom crew, and in my pity I said nought to undeceive him.

He knew not how long he had dwelt upon the island. I asked him whether he had been alone all the time, and why he had not discovered himself to the French and English pirates who had doubtless sometimes come ashore.

He smiled cunningly, and said, "Could I trust them? They were not my friends. Say that I told them of the ship, and the great treasure it contained, think you they would not have desired it for their own, and taken it from me, and left me poor? I trusted La Noue" (his thoughts were straying to his youth and the siege of La Rochelle): "all men trusted him. He was saved at Jarnac."

And then he fell a-musing. At another time he told me that he had been minded once to join a party that had landed, telling them nothing, with intent to return at some convenient season for his treasure. But he feared lest during his absence it should be discovered, and he might return only to find that the vessel had been stripped bare. The treasure was the sole thing he clung to; he could not bring himself to part from it even for a day; once a day at the least he descended into the cabin and feasted his eyes on the great store of gold and jewels. He had become a miser. And so he carefully shunned such men as had come ashore; and once he had been near to starving, when a crew encamped beneath the cliff wherein was the entrance to his cavern, and remained there for several days, he not daring to issue forth for food, lest he should be seen.

I marvelled often that the Captain never showed any distrust of me. He took me often into the cabin, and sometimes set me to count the money piece by piece, and to display the jewels on the lids of the chests. Indeed, he took, methought, a childish pleasure in thus exhibiting his wealth, and when the precious things

were all set in array before him, he would gaze from them to me with a simple pride and contentation which I found infinitely moving.

II

Thus many days passed. I looked often out to sea for a friendly ship, but none touched on the island, and those that sailed by were Spanish built, and I durst not hail them.

One night a great storm arose. Rain fell in floods, thunder roared all around, the sky was by moments ablaze with lightning such as I had never seen. Driven from my hut, I wended my way toilsomely through the blinding torrents to the cavern, and took shelter for the remainder of the night with Captain Q on board the galleon. Towards morning the fury of the storm abated, but the wind was still high, and when we left our refuge and stood on the cliff, so that the sunbeams might dry our drenched garments, we espied a ship fast on the rocks a little distance from shore. The sea was tempestuous: mighty waves smote and battered upon the vessel, and I perceived very clearly that she was fast going to pieces.

While we stood watching, and pitying the poor wights gathered upon deck, a man sprang overboard with a rope, and struck out for the land, the waves buffeting him sorely, dashing over him, so that many times he seemed to have sunk to the bottom. Stirred by the spectacle, the Captain put off his caution and timorousness, and stepped forth from behind the rock where hitherto he had stood at gaze. His red garb flashed upon the eye of the swimmer, and methought I heard a despairing cry for help. On the instant I ran down to the shore, with Captain Q at my side. Half witless as he was in general, the Captain had all his faculties at this moment of great need. With me he plunged to his waist into the sea, with no less calmness than a man might wade a brook, and caught the swimmer as he was on the point of sinking. And as we hauled him safe ashore, I lifted my voice in a shout of joy: for the half-drowned seaman was none other than Richard Ball, boatswain of my own ship, the *Elizabeth*.

[image]

*HE CAUGHT THE SWIMMER AS HE WAS ON THE POINT OF
SINKING*

"Why, Dick, man," I cried, "'tis you!"

"God bless 'ee!" panted the man, and then, unable to speak more, he pointed to the wreck, and seemed to urge that something should be done for his mess-mates there.

And now Captain Q once more showed the mettle of a man. Catching up the rope that was looped about the boatswain's body, he called to me to help him to lash it about a rock; and when this was done, the crew and the adventurers came along it one by one, hand over hand, from the vessel, until all, to the number of thirty-seven, were safe on shore. Joyously I greeted them, calling each man by name. Hilary Rawdon, the captain, came the last; and he had but set his feet upon the strand when the hapless vessel fell apart, and was swept away upon the waves.

Groans and cries of lamentation broke from the shipwrecked mariners; their grief at the loss of their vessel for a time outweighed all thankfulness for their escape from death. But Hilary clapped me on the back, and wrung my hand, and cried—

"Gramercy, lad, but 'tis good to see thee once again. Verily I believed thee dead, and what was I to say to thy good folk at home?"

And then we fell a-talking eagerly, and the other adventurers flocked about us, desiring to know what had befallen me since the day when I went ashore on Hispaniola and returned not. And I was so rapt with joy at the sight of my friends that I laughed, and for sheer gladness greeted them again by name—"Tom Hawke, old friend!" and "Harry Loveday, my bawcock!"—and was so possessed by my ecstasy that I forgot Captain Q until Hilary recalled me to the present with a question—

"And who is our blood-red friend, old lad?"

I swung myself about. The Frenchman was gone.

"'Tis Captain Q," I said, and was about to tell more, when I caught myself up, in doubt of what the Captain would say if his secret were disclosed. Having trusted me, peradventure he would deem himself betrayed if I should make any revelation. 'Twas borne upon me that I must needs consult with him before telling any whit of his story.

"Methinks your Captain Kew is of a backward disposition, seeing that he hath departed without our thanks," said Hilary. "We must e'en go after him, my lad. But let us hear all that hath happened to thee since we gave thee up for dead."

I told how I was taken prisoner, and of my captivity and servitude under Don Alfonso de Silva de Marabona, and Tom Hawke, in his boyish way, instantly caught at the name, and wished he might live to pluck Old Marrow-bones by the beard. Then I told of my escape and journey to Tortuga, where I had been, as I guessed, a matter of a month.

"And your Captain Kew, what of him?" asked Hilary. "Is he of the Kews of Ditchingham, and how came he here?"

And I saw that the secret must come out. If I did not myself tell it, my friends would certainly not rest until they had discovered it for themselves, and 'twas not unlike that Captain Q would fare very ill at their hands, and lose all the treasure whereby he set such store. Better that his story should be told by one who had fellow-feeling for him than that all should be left to chance. So I took Hilary Rawdon aside and acquainted him with my discoveries.

"Why, 'tis he that is the thief," cried Hilary when he had heard all. "We have as good a right to the treasure as he."

"Some of it belongs by right to Antonio de Marabona, whom his uncle has defrauded," I replied.

"Tuts, lad, in this part of the world it belongs to them that can take it. Did we not sail hither, I ask you, in quest of treasure? Have we not lost men and suffered shipwreck in this very adventure against the Queen's enemies? Should we not have captured this very galleon had we come but eleven years ago? Is not your answer 'Yes,' and 'Yes,' and 'Yes'?"

He looked at me with triumph. Certainly there was no gainsaying his reasoning, though the third of his questions had a smack of inconsequence that bid for laughter. But I made a condition, as seemed to me just.

"Give me your word," I said, "that Captain Q shall suffer no hurt, and shall have a fair share of the treasure. As for Antonio, I fear me he must suffer for having been born a Spaniard."

"He is no worse off than he was," said Hilary. "The galleon, as he believes, lies at the bottom of the sea; and I trow if you returned to him, and brought him here, and restored to him what was once his, Tom Hawke or Harry Loveday, or one of the mariners, would incontinently knock him on the head (being a Spaniard), and all be as before. And as for Captain Q, 'tis the fortune of war, my lad; we take from him what he himself took."

"Yet 'tis by his help that you, and Tom Hawke, and Harry Loveday, and all the mariners, are this moment alive," I said.

"True, old lad," said he, "and we must not forget it. But come, let us wend to this wondrous vault of his, and see with our own eyes the marvel you tell us of."

With us we took only Hawke and Loveday, leaving the mariners to their devices. This was at my wish, for I feared lest the men, if they in their present distress should learn of rich treasure so close at hand, should forget gratitude and discipline, and leap like hungry wolves upon their prey. They were good seamen, and honest souls withal, but lawless and ill-taught, and possessed with a marvellous scorn of men of other race. And now they stood upon the beach and

bemoaned their fate, and cursed the day when they sailed out of Southampton on this ill-starred and bootless quest.

We four went on to the cavern. Captain Q seemed to have expected us, for when we came to the entrance, there was he, sword in hand, ready to dispute our advance. Tom Hawke, a wild young spirit, was for rushing upon him there and then, and beating him down by main force, and indeed he stepped forward to cross swords with the Frenchman. But I could not endure that my friend should be dealt with thus, and calling Tom Hawke back (who indeed already repented of his discourtesy), I proposed that we should humour the Frenchman—call him Captain, place ourselves at his orders, and promise to attempt to make a passage for the vessel, so that he might once more sail the seas with a merry crew.

"T'faith, a right excellent conceit!" cried Hilary. "I salute you, Captain Q," he added, with a profound bow. "Unfold to him our purpose, Kitt."

And I went before them and spoke to the Captain, and when he understood he smiled with pleasure, dropped his point, and, with a commanding gesture that mightily became him, bade us bring up his new company to set about the work.

"Oui, certainement, mon Capitaine," said Hilary; and when by and by the men, in sober mood, came up, and the matter was put to them, "Ay, ay, sir," cried Richard Ball, the boatswain; "Ay, ay, sir," the men chimed in, and the Captain led us into the cavern.

Cries of astonishment broke from the men's lips when they saw that miracle of Nature, and of admiration as they walked around about the galleon and marked her noble lines.

"A rare craft indeed!" said Hilary. "She is worth a fortune to us, Kitt, even without the treasure she contains. And that same treasure, my lad—I yearn to dip my fingers into it."

"Wait; let me bargain with Captain Q," I said, and I followed the Frenchman up the ladder to the deck, and stood long in talk with him. When I returned to my friends I told them that the Captain was willing to share a great portion of his gold among them, if they would bring the vessel to the sea and rig her for a voyage.

"Vive le Capitaine Q!" cried Hilary, and the whole company broke forth into lusty cheers. The Captain's eyes gleamed with pleasure; he called them his children, vowing to lead them a-roving and do great despite upon the Spaniards. But his face darkened when Hilary offered to mount on board and inspect the treasure.

"No, no," he cried; "that is for none to see but my corporal."

And I persuaded my friends to accept the denial for the time, and to accompany me in a circuit of the cavern to find a spot where a passage might be made to the sea.

The fore-part of the cavern, towards the cliff, was much encumbered with fragments of rock, large and small. The sides were of rock; if the fore-wall was of rock also, 'twas clear that with all the tools we had at hand—pikes and belaying-pins, and such-like gear—'twould be impossible to open a passage. With gunpowder we might have blasted the rock but for the water which flowed in at every tide, and so shut us from access to the lower part of the wall. But if this were of earth, the task was one that could be compassed with time and patience. 'Twas our first concern to discover the thickness of the wall, and to this end Richard Ball clambered on to the loftiest of the rocky fragments, and another man mounted upon his shoulders, so that he might reach to one of the narrow fissures that let the daylight in. And then, by passing a pike through it, he proved by the report of a man without that the wall was no more than six feet thick.

Next, our task was to remove a number of rocks that lay without like a natural rampart about the base of the cliff, and were washed by a strong current. Ropes, whereof the galleon held a plenty, were fixed about them, and by dint of much hauling, the rocks were displaced one by one, and being removed, the sea entered the cavern more freely, though 'twas clear that the water in it would never be of depth enough to float the galleon.

As soon as the tide was gone down, we essayed to pierce a hole through the wall a little above the water level. To our great joy, we found that this portion of the wall was of earth, and before the tide rose again the men had cut a narrow tunnel through to the base of the cliff. It being night by the time this was done, the men made for themselves beds of grass and leaves upon the skirts of the woodland, being divided into watches as on board ship.

With morning light we took up our task again. We perceived that the ebb tide had carried away a great deal of the loose earth, and so made the tunnel wider. The men toiled all day by companies, increasing the passage both in width and height, the sides and roof being shored up with timber from the woods against a fall of earth from above. Captain Q watched the labour with a childish curiosity, and, in pursuance of my plan of humouring him, I now and then prompted him with commands to give the men, and they responded with obsequious and cheerful cries of "Ay, ay, sir," winking to each other the while.

So the work went on, day after day, until an opening had been made of width enough for the passage of the galleon. There was a danger now lest it might be espied from a passing ship, the which to prevent, the men brought down great armfuls of brushwood from above, and arranged them to form a screen. A sentinel was posted at a point on the rising ground behind the cliff to give warning of any vessel that should approach. While some of the men had been employed at the hole, others, the more skilful of the crew, were set to work to caulk the seams of the galleon, to fell trees for new masts and spars, and to repair the sails which

were found on board. By the time this was accomplished, nought remained but to dislodge the rocks that still choked the passage-way from the cavern. Some of these were so large as to require the labour of our whole company to remove them. We had hauled away many and laid them at the foot of the cliff, when one day, a week or more after the beginning of the work, the sentinel gave out that he saw two vessels beating up against the wind towards the island.

"Maybe they are the Spaniards that were in chase of us when we were wrecked," said Hilary. "'Tis not unlike they have come to see what has become of us. Mayhap they saw us run aground, and I doubt not would have been here before but that the wind has been too strong against them all this while."

Our whole company being gathered in the cavern, arms were served out to the men from the galleon's armoury in case the Spaniards should land. The news of their coming wrought marvellously upon Captain Q. He sharpened his sword, donned a breastplate, and told the men, with great exaltation of spirit, that the moment was at hand when we should rove the seas and deal doughtily with our enemies.

The vessels came slowly towards us, and anchored a little westward of the cavern. We saw two boats put off from each, filled with men wearing the leather hats and steel cuirasses of the Spanish soldiery. Spying at them with Hilary, I reckoned that they must number sixty or more. They landed at a point near where my hut had been, and 'twas soon plain from their cries that they had come upon parts of the wreckage of the *Elizabeth*. Some of them ascended the cliff, and went into the woodland, doubtless to gather fruits; whereupon I quitted the cavern, and stealthily made my way up, to see what they were about. I entered the woods after them, and witnessed their stark amazement when they lighted upon signs of the recent felling of trees. Anon they hasted back to their main body on the beach; a council was held, and then the whole company, save only a few men left to guard the boats, set forth with the manifest purpose to search for the woodcutters.

Thereupon Tom Hawke proposed we should seize the boats and row out to the galleons and board them. But this bold device Hilary would by no means countenance. Besides that we knew not what force of men there might still be left on the vessels, we must needs go at the very least two hundred yards in the open ere we could win to the boats, in full sight of the men on guard. The alarm would be given, and the Spaniards might be upon us before we could put off. But since the advantage is ever with the attack, I made bold to put forward another plan, to wit, that we should quit the cavern, steal into the woods, and lay an ambush for the men that were prowling there. This proposal was debated for a while among our assembly, and being presently approved by all, Captain Q, who comprehended everything with perfect soundness of mind, set off with drawn

sword in the quality of leader.

We stole out of the cavern secretly by favour of the brushwood screen, and followed him in great quiet round the shoulder of the cliff, winding about thence until we gained the wood. There we stood fast, and I went alone among the trees to discover the direction of the Spaniards' march. I crept in and out as a hunter might stalk his quarry, and by and by perceived them proceeding slowly, in close ranks, silently, and with their matches already kindled. I knew that the course they were taking would bring them in due time to a ravine, narrow, and of no great depth, that wound through the woodland, a little brook running along its bottom. Bethinking me that, could we gain the further side of the ravine, we should be in rare good case to deal with the Spaniards, I sped back to my friends, acquainted them with what I had seen, and led them swiftly through the wood.

We had no sooner taken post in the copse I had designed for our ambush, than we espied the Spaniards coming directly towards us. And then 'twas Captain Q who made our dispositions. However disordered his wits might be in common matters, he lacked nothing in the parts of a skilful commander. Keeping ten with him, of whom I was one, he bade the rest to steal down the ravine, ascend the nearer bank at a convenient spot, and, when they should hear sounds of a fray with us, come with great speed and fall upon the enemy in the rear. Hilary departed very willingly on this errand, and we ten remained close in hiding with Captain Q. I marked how his eyes gleamed, and his lips pressed firmly the one upon the other, and I was fain to conclude he had a very great courage and delight in battle.

His design was to wait until the Spaniards came to the brink of the ravine, and then salute them with a volley. But just as it was the vivid red of his garments that first drew my eyes to him, so now the same brightness made our situation known to the enemy before they came within gunshot of us. One of them spied him, and cried out; the company halted and blew upon their matches; then their captain called to us in a loud voice to yield ourselves, and when we made no answer, he bade his men advance. They pressed forward until they were come within a few paces of the ravine, and set up their muskets on the rests to have good aim at us. And then, to be beforehand with them, Captain Q gave us the word to fire, the which we obeyed all ten together, whereby a half-dozen of the Spaniards fell; and while in all haste we primed our weapons again, their captain divided his company into two bands, and sent them to right and left to scale the ravine and come through the wood upon our flanks. To a seasoned man of war, as doubtless he was, the fewness of our numbers was made apparent when we discharged our guns.

There was not a man of us but knew we stood in great peril. The enemy was of Spain's finest soldiery, and though by the grace of God we English have

beaten them many times on field and flood, we have had proofs enough of their valour. If our friends should fail to come at point to our aid, we could not by any means prevail against them. But Captain Q bade us set our backs against trees, half of us facing to the right, half to the left, and we stood there ready to do what Englishmen might against our Queen's enemies.

We could not hear their approach; doubtless they hoped to creep close to us and then overwhelm us in one general assault. My heart smote upon my ribs, and my lips grew wondrous dry; 'tis no mean trial to a man to stand thus awaiting an enemy whom he cannot see, and knowing that in one swift moment he may be at grips with death. And suddenly there was a roar of muskets, and immediately afterwards, through the smoke, I saw the Spaniards rushing towards us. My musket was in its rest; blindly and with fumbling fingers I set my match to the touch-hole and pulled the cock, and, having fired my shot, drew my sword and stood to defend myself. Our volley had checked the onrush, but only for a moment, and I saw a crowd of Spaniards leaping as it were straight upon me. Then Captain Q came to my side, crying out that we would fight shoulder to shoulder, and his presence and cheerful words filled me with a new courage.

The enemy were yet a dozen paces from us, and we had our swords out-thrust to meet them, when the air rang with English shouts, and a great din of firing, and some of the Spaniards fell on their faces, and rose not again. The rest came to a halt, threw a glance behind, and beheld our men, with Hilary at their head, springing like deer from the edge of the ravine. This sight was enough for their stomachs. The Spaniards fled as one man, leapt into the ravine, clambered up the other side, and made all speed by the way they had come, to regain their boats. Our men ran after them, and pursued them to the verge of the woodland, and would have continued to the very margin of the sea, but Captain Q forbade them, fearing that, if the enemy saw the smallness of our company, they would rally, and on the open strand would have us at advantage. And so we did not show ourselves much beyond the line of trees, but stood there and watched the Spaniards as they hasted down to the shore, and, embarking on their boats, returned to the galleons.

[image]

*THE SPANIARDS LEAPT INTO THE RAVINE AND CLAMBERED
UP THE OTHER SIDE*

The tale of our loss was exceeding small. One poor fellow was killed, four had received hurts, but slight. We were all wondrous merry at the happy issue of

our ambush, and Captain Q put on the high look and swelling port of a conqueror.

III

The enemy having departed, we wondered what they would do, scarce supposing that they would sail away without making another attempt upon us. Yet it appeared that this was their purpose, for as soon as the boats were hoisted aboard, the anchors were weighed, and the ships stood away towards the west of the island. This put Captain Q in a fury. He commanded the men to make all speed to finish and complete their task at the cavern, so that he might sail out and pursue the vessels. But this was mere foolishness, and I humoured him with talk of other fights in store. Hilary Rawdon again dispatched a sentinel up the hill, bidding him to post himself at a spot whence he could see, with the aid of a perspective glass, the channel between Tortuga and Hispaniola. It had come into his mind that the Spaniards had perchance sailed away merely to land on the southern shore of the island, with the intent to march again upon us unawares. But the man told us by and by that one of the ships had heaved-to in the channel to the south, while the other was making all sail to the westward.

”’Tis bound for St. John of Goave or San Domingo, without doubt,” said Hilary, ”to bring back a force sufficient to annihilate us.”

”What grace have we before they can return?” I asked.

”Maybe a week, maybe more. ’Tis always ’to-morrow’ with the Spaniards. They put off both the evil day and the good, and many’s the time they have come to grief for no other reason than their habit of procrastination. We will make all speed, Kitt. ’Twould be a sin to let this great treasure fall into their hands through any sloth of ours.”

The men worked with right good-will, hauling away the rocks from the entrance of the cavern, until they left the passage clear. But even at high tide there was no depth of water sufficient to float the galleon, and we must needs take thought how to bring her to the sea. We soon proved, to our great joy, that she rested on sand, and we had but to dig beneath her, and to cut a channel, and with the flood tide we could haul her out. But we could not begin this work until the next low tide, when the water in the cavern, having now a free outlet, flowed away. We built a dam to prevent its return, and then, by dint of toiling steadily, some resting while the others worked, we contrived in two days to grave out a dock wherein the vessel might ride. The work was done with great quietness, for the enemy’s galleon was anchored but a few miles away, and ’twas very neces-

sary that no sound should provoke them to come and spy what we were about. The mariners knew how much hung on their being left undisturbed until the ship could be rigged and towed out to sea, and they put a great restraint upon themselves. There was risk enough in the chance that a Spanish ship might appear off the coast. The spectacle of a dismantled hull could not fail to attract her notice, and if she should be a ship of war there was little hope that the *San Felipe* would ever sail the sea again.

To step the masts was no trifling business. The stump of the old mainmast was broken off low down and jaggedly, and 'twas a full day's work for the most skilful of the *Elizabeth's* carpenters to fit the stump for the pine stem they had prepared. The mast itself was but roughly finished. It was not stripped of its bark: the time would not serve for niceties; Hilary indeed doubted whether, with the utmost expedition, we should have the vessel in navigable trim before the galleons returned. By good luck the stump of the mizzen had not been snapped off so low as the others; and a jury mast was rigged in a third of the time the mainmast had taken.

The *San Felipe* had no boats, all she had carried having been stove in during the earthquake and washed away. But a boat of some sort was needful to tow the vessel out; wherefore, while some men were scraping the hull, and others rigging the spars, the rest hastened to the woods and worked with might and main to fashion a canoe of cedar. Though we employed every minute of daylight, the men taking turns to rest in the hot hours, 'twas full ten days before the work was done. And then one afternoon, when we were lying on the cliffs basking in ease we had not known for many a day, the sentinel espied three sail low down on the horizon to the west.

"Without doubt the Dons are coming back for us," cried Hilary. Then in French he asked Captain Q, with a show of deference, to give us his commands.

"We will sail forth and fight them," cried the dauntless Captain.

"'Tis a brave saying," said Harry Loveday; "but methinks 'twere best to sail out by night and make what speed we may for home. We have the treasure, and though I am as ready as any man to fight when there is somewhat to be gained by fighting, I hold that in our present case, with the enemy maybe four to one, 'twould best beseem us to secure what we have. 'Twas for treasure we came, not for needless knocks."

"There is much reason in thee, Harry," said Hilary, "and I own if 'twere sure we should escape these villain Dons and come safe to an English haven, I might think thy counsel just. But consider: the wind is light; our vessel is in no trim to make good sailing; and if the wind holds as at this present we could scarce run out of sight of the Spaniards before dawn. 'Tis full moon: we should be discerned from a great way off; and when they see us they can run us down. Furthermore,

the guns on our galleon are light metal, and we have no great store of powder and ball, so that we are in no case to fight a war-ship, furnished, beyond doubt, with heavy guns. Remember, we barely outsailed the Spaniards even when we were in our own well-found (but ill-fated) *Elizabeth*; and if we could not stand to fight two, as all agreed we could not, how much less can we stand to fight three?"

While Hilary was thus reasoning, Captain Q, who, having given his voice for fighting, was confident we should obey without question, had gotten himself away, so that we were left to converse at our pleasure. I well knew that, by dint of my artifices of persuasion, I could bring the Captain to believe that, whatsoever resolution we might come to, it sprang from him.

"Well, then," said Tom Hawke in answer to Hilary, "if we must not run, for fear of being overhauled, what is left for us to do? If we cannot fight three Spanish ships on the high sea, assuredly we cannot fight the crews of them on land, and 'tis certain as to-morrow's sunrise that we must be discovered here."

"What if Captain Q be right?" said I. "Is not the bold course the best? If we bide here and wait to be attacked, the event will be even as Tom says: the don Spaniards outnumber us, and with all the will in the world we can scarce hold out against them. But might we not attack the vessel at anchor before the three others join with her? Aboard of her we might show a clean pair of heels to the Dons."

"Why didst not speak before, Kitt?" cried Hilary. "The time is fleeting, and while we still prate these vessels are sailing ever nearer. In sooth, yours is the way, and we will obey Captain Q's command."

We had cast down the dam that had been raised, and the tide being at the flood, the sea filled our dock, and we saw with great delight the *San Felipe* float upright on her keel. The most of us got aboard her; the rest towed her out of the cavern; then they also came aboard, and Captain Q looked round with pleasure on his company.

Having hoisted the sails (poor patched things as they were), we set a course eastward along the shore, the wind blowing from the north-east. Our design was to round the island and come with the wind down upon the galleon at her anchorage off the south coast. We hoped in the night-time we might surprise her and take possession of her, and then slip her cables and make away before the three vessels we had seen could beat up against the wind.

The wind being so contrary, we could make no good offing, and were in some peril of running on sunken rocks, to say nothing of that other peril of meeting an enemy's ship or flotilla. But by sunset we came safe at the north-eastern corner of the island. We rounded the eastern side, sailing large, and turned into the channel betwixt Hispaniola and Tortuga even as the moon rose upon our right hand. A black night would have most favoured our design of capturing the

galleon; but our master said we had first to come at her, and being ignorant of the channel, he was right glad to have some light upon the course.

The southern shore of Tortuga bends at its middle somewhat to the north-west, so that for a time the galleon was hidden from our eyes, and we could keep the mid-channel without risk of being seen. But when we had come to that point, our master was fain to steer somewhat nearer to the cliffs: 'twould mayhap ruin our scheme if we were espied too soon by the Spaniards, wherefore he said we had best avail ourselves of the shadows where we could. Hilary and I stood at the helm beside the master, and we were troubled when we felt the keel graze a sandbank. At the fall of night the wind had freshened, and we were making a fair speed, so that if the vessel struck there would be but a small chance of hauling her off, even if she did not spring a leak and take water. By good luck and the care of our master we escaped these perils of shoals, and drew nearer to our goal.

We did not doubt a good watch would be kept on board the galleon, the which had taken up her present station, as we reckoned, so as to guard against any attempt of ours to cross to Hispaniola on rafts or canoes. Doubtless, also, they would have their guns ready loaded and their matches kindled; and maybe the vessel was riding on a spring cable. Hilary bade the most of our men to lie down out of sight, so that when the Spaniards should behold us, as they must soon do, they might not take alarm from a crowded deck.

"We must be wary, Kitt," said Hilary to me. "'Twould be rank ill-luck if she should slip her cable and stand away to meet the galleons out of the west, and maybe fire a gun to give 'em warning."

Being nearer shore, the *San Felipe* went more slowly than when she was out in mid-channel. We crept round the jutting points and across the coves very stealthily, the men holding perfect silence, so that the Spaniards on the vessel lying at anchor had no warning of our approach and nearness until, as we fetched about a low spit of land, we came to a straight reach of the channel, and beheld the enemy half-a-mile distant. Since secrecy was no longer to be maintained, Hilary bade the master to steer full into the broad path of the moonlight, so that we might be distinctly seen. With his perspective glass the sentinel on the vessel would discover the *San Felipe* to be of Spanish build, and we trusted that he would suppose her to be a friend. At Hilary's bidding some of our men made ready their grappling-irons, and so we drew nearer to the anchorage.

A light moved on the ship's deck, and we judged that we must now have been seen. As soon, therefore, as we came within hailing distance, Hilary commanded Richard Ball, who had some Spanish, to go into the bows and question what the vessel was.

"The galleon *Bonaventura*, of his Catholic Majesty of Spain," came the answer to his shout. "Heave-to, or we fire! Who are you?"

"The galleon *San Felipe*, chased by corsairs," cried Ball. "Can we anchor hereby?"

"Aye. Heave-to; we will send a boat. Are the corsairs dogs of English?"

"English and French," says Ball, cocking an eye at Captain Q, who was reclining below the level of our bulwarks, so that his red garments should not betray us.

"Cry that our helm is injured, and we will lower sail," said Hilary.

This Ball did, and our master bade the men to lower sail; but before 'twas done we had run very near to the *Bonaventura*, and there was enough way on our vessel to bring her alongside. We had come within a cable length of the Spaniard when we saw her boat let down, and then, our helm being put up, we drifted still closer upon the enemy.

"Bid them beware, or we shall be foul of them," said Hilary.

And as Ball cried aloud, we heard much old swearing on the *Bonaventura's* decks, the which were at this time thronged with men. The captain (as Ball informed us) cursed our damaged helm very heartily, it being answerable, as he supposed, for this imminent risk of fouling. But in truth our helm was in right good trim, and the master chuckled in merry sort as he ran the *San Felipe* close alongside of the *Bonaventura*, their bulwarks just touching.

And then, at the word from Hilary, our men cast their grapnels aboard, and our whole company, with machetes and half-pikes from the *San Felipe's* armoury, leapt upon the *Bonaventura's* deck. Captain Q was the first to board, and the Spaniards cried out in amazement when they saw his tall red figure springing towards them, rapier in hand, and with two score men behind, all silent, for Hilary had commanded them to hold their peace, lest the other vessels should be near at hand.

The swiftness of our onset took the Spaniards all aback. Some of them, being unarmed, shrank away from us; the rest gathered about their captain at the mainmast, where they stood to ward off our attack, and for some five minutes held us at bay. 'Twas a hand-to-hand encounter; there were no fire-arms used; steel clashed on steel, and many shrewd knocks were given and taken. But, saving in point of numbers, the odds were all against the hapless Spaniards. The very look of Captain Q, his strange garb, his war-lit countenance, had some part in daunting them, and as we pressed vehemently upon them, Hilary and Tom Hawke in the fore-front, they fell into a panic, and cast down their arms, crying for quarter. Hilary bade our men instantly seize them and carry them below, and within a little they were all safe bestowed and battened under hatches.

And now I espied their boat that had been lowered making all speed to the westward, and I asked Hilary whether we should not pursue them, believing that their intent was to acquaint those on the approaching galleons with what had

[image]

*THE SWIFTESS OF OUR ONSET TOOK THE SPANIARDS ALL
ABACK*

befallen.

"Let 'em go," cried he, with a laugh. "If they do fall in with the vessels and tell them their tale, we shall be departed ere they can bring them to us."

"And they will not reach them," said Tom Hawke. "See, the boat has run upon a reef."

'Twas even as he had said. The crew strove hard to pull the boat clear, but without avail, and then they leapt overboard and waded waist-deep towards the shore. Not all of them came safe to it. On a sudden we heard a blood-curdling scream, and then another. Beyond question some of the hapless men had fallen a prey to ground-sharks.

IV

The *Bonaventura* having thus become ours, we made haste to bring to her such useful stores as the *San Felipe* contained, and the chests holding the treasure. I went with Captain Q into the cabin, and observed with what pangs he saw his chests in the hands of our men. He stood on watch when they were set on a cradle for slinging on deck; and followed every movement with a jealous eye until the chests were bestowed in the cabin of the *Bonaventura*. They were three in number, two large and one small, and when the two former had been removed, Captain Q appeared content, and was for leaving the third behind. I remembered that I had never seen this one open, and knowing what delight he took in contemplating and fingering the contents of the others, I could not but suppose that the smallest chest held things of little worth. Seeing that the Captain appeared in a mind to leave it, I asked him whether that was his intent, and he replied that it held nought but old papers, accounts, and bills of lading, and such-like things, and told me very courteously that I might have it for my own. 'Twas not a gift I greatly valued, but I would not vex him by refusing it, and so I made one of the men convey it to the *Bonaventura*.

While the mariners were busied about transferring the things from the one

vessel to the other, Hilary took counsel with his friends as touching the disposal of the Spanish prisoners now huddled in the hold. I spoke for carrying them with us, and putting them ashore either on some island we should pass on our homeward voyage, or on the coast of Spain when we had crossed the ocean. But Tom Hawke cried out very stoutly against this.

"Why should we burden ourselves with them?" he said. "The ship will sail the lighter without them; and bethink ye what a monstrous deal of food they will consume! Let us batten them down in the hold of the *San Felipe* and so leave them."

"As I live, a right good notion!" said Hilary. "Be sure they will be found when the other vessels come up, and 'twould please me mightily an I could see the meeting. 'Twill be a cause of delay also, for they will assuredly tell what has befallen them, and every minute thus filled will better our chances of escape."

"But they will increase our enemies' force, and, moreover, we shall lose as many minutes in carrying them from this vessel to the *San Felipe*," said I.

"Which we shall gain by the lightening of our freight," replied Hilary. "And we will e'en set about it at once, while the men are still bringing the goods aboard."

Whereupon the Spaniards were brought up in small parties and conveyed to the *San Felipe*. And then, all things being ready, the *Bonaventura* cast off and made sail, beating up against the wind as she retraced the course we had followed before.

The sun was rising as she came out into the open sea beyond the south-eastern corner of the island. 'Twas Hilary's design to set a straight course for England.

"There is treasure enough aboard," he said, "and did we essay to gain more we might lose what we have. Remember the dog in the fable; let us not lose the substance by grasping at the shadow."

"I fear me we shall have trouble with Captain Q," I said. "His mind is set on taking up his old trade of corsair, and he will not readily quit these haunts of the sea-rovers."

"Then he will e'en be a Jonah, and we had best cast him at once overboard," cried Tom Hawke.

"Nay, let us leave him to Kitt," said Hilary. "Mind ye how Kitt wrought upon us with his tongue when we discovered him in the hold? Kitt shall be our ambassador."

As we made the north-eastern corner of the island we espied, far away to the west, two Spanish galleons making what speed they could against the wind, and, we doubted not, coming in chase of us. At sight of them Captain Q was beset by a great excitement, and called upon our master to heave-to and await

the villain Dons.

"Ay, ay, sir," was the ready reply. But seeing that the moment was now come when I must employ my best arts to bring him to accord with us (and, for all that Hilary had said, I had no great faith in my tongue's persuasiveness), I led him apart, and by degrees brought him to an understanding of the resolution to which we had come. 'Twas for some time a question whether the Captain's passion for fight or his avarice would get the better of it in his unstable mind, but the balance turned in our favour when I took him down into the cabin, and, pointing to the treasure-chests, asked him whether he could endure to risk the loss of things so precious. He stood in deep thought for a while; then, heaving a great sigh, he yielded.

All that day the Spaniards continued to hold us in chase, and when with the veering of the wind they gained somewhat upon us, I marked how the eyes of Captain Q lit up as it seemed that we must fight in our own despite. But they dropped away again, and at nightfall were hull down upon the sea-line, and when next morning's sun arose they were nowhere to be seen.

From that time the Captain fell into a settled melancholy. 'Twould seem that the sudden changes that were come about in his life, after eleven years of solitude, had put a strain upon his already enfeebled intellect 'twas unable to bear. He sat for long hours on deck, gazing towards the shores he would never see again, silent, taking no heed of us or of aught that happened around him. Nay, he ceased to watch over his treasure with the same jealousy, and when Hilary and the other adventurers could no longer curb their impatience, but demanded to see the wealth which they were to share, he consented, with a wan and feeble smile. We opened the chests in his presence, only Hilary, Tom Hawke, and I being there with him.

[image]

WE OPENED THE CHESTS IN HIS PRESENCE

My report had prepared my friends to see gold and jewels of great price, but they were none the less amazed beyond measure when the contents of the chests were displayed before them. One, the property of Don Alfonso de Silva de Marabona (his name was writ in full upon the cover), held enough to make us all rich beyond our dreams. The other, consigned to his Catholic Majesty King Philip himself, was filled with rare gems, the value whereof we could not so much as guess. "By my beard, Kitt," cried Hilary, "'twas a rarely kind fate that sent thee as slave to thy Admiral Marrow-bones. We might have roved the seas full ten

years without getting a tithe of this treasure.”

”And it vexes me sorely to think that my friend Antonio can profit nothing by it,” said I.

”Reck nothing of him,” cried Tom Hawke. ”What does that little chest of thine contain? Let us see, old lad.”

”’Tis only papers, as Captain Q told me,” said I, looking for confirmation at the Captain, who, however, sat listless and inattentive in his chair.

”Well, let us see them,” said Hilary. ”Maybe they will give us the true value of this store of gems.”

We opened the chest, and Tom Hawke sniffed and hemmed when he saw that it held indeed nought but a few documents, somewhat mildewed and yellow. They were all writ in the Spanish tongue, not one of us could read them; and though Richard Ball had some skill in speaking the language, he confessed when I asked him that he could not even read his own native English, and so was not like to be of service here. We laid the parchments again in the chest, I promising myself that when we came to port I would have them overlooked by some one who was well acquainted with the language of Castile.

The *Bonaventura* made quick sailing, and we had fair weather until we came off the Azores, where we suffered a heavy buffeting from a storm. Somewhat battered, our galleon sailed into Southampton Water one day in March of 1588. Captain Q had aged ten years in his aspect during the two months’ voyage. He rarely broke his silence, yielded with a patient smile to my least suggestion, and seemed even to have forgotten the treasure which had once been so dear to him. When it came to be divided, a tenth share was set apart by general consent for the poor witless gentleman, and being well placed through the offices of an attorney of our town, the Captain might live in his own house and enjoy great comfort for the rest of his days. One-third was apportioned among the mariners, every man of them becoming possessor of means sufficient to keep him luxuriously for his rank and condition. An eighth was allotted to me, and the remainder parted out among Hilary and his fellow-adventurers.

As soon as might be I placed the documents from my chest in the hands of a man well skilled in the Spanish tongue. And then to my great joy ’twas proved that one of them had a vast importance for my friend Antonio. The story told him by the admiral, his uncle, was false. Don Antonio, so far from having sold his estates in Hispaniola to his brother, had in fact purchased the admiral’s estates; the document in question was a conveyance drawn up in due form according to the law of Spain. Having learnt this, I was hot set to have the document conveyed to Antonio, so that the wrong he had suffered might be undone. It may well be conceived that, in that year when the great Armada was being fitted out against us, there was no communication between us and Spain, and if I had waited until

the two nations were reconciled, 'tis like that the admiral would have enjoyed his ill-got wealth for long years undisturbed. But I found means, through some excellent friends, to dispatch the document to Don Antonio's lawyers in Madrid (their name being writ upon it) by way of Paris; and many years afterwards, when I had a humble place at her Majesty's court, I learnt through the Spanish ambassador that right had been done.

Eighteen years ago, when I journeyed to Madrid for behoof of Prince Charles, there seeking a bride, ('twas on my return that King James made me a knight), I found my old friend Antonio a grandee of Spain, and a very stout and (I must own) pompous gentleman. He did not recognise me: indeed, 'twas not to be expected that he should, seeing that when he had known me my cheeks were as smooth as the palm of your hand, and the hair of my head thick and strong; whereas now I am bearded like the pard (as Will Shakespeare says), and my locks, alas! are sparse and grizzled. But when I made myself known to him he clipped me by the hand, and thanked me with exceeding warmth for what I had been able to do for his good. Moreover, he told me that his own uncle Don Alfonso had been aboard the foremost galleon of those two that stood in chase of us when we sailed away that day from Tortuga. The noble admiral was cast into a wondrous amazement when he came upon the *San Felipe*, the which had been so long lost, and lived ever after in a constant dread lest his ill-doing should be brought to light. This wrought so heavily upon his mind that it became disordered, and when the full tale of his crime was brought in due time from Spain he sank into a dotage and shortly after died. Don Antonio was pleased to give me, in remembrance of our ancient friendship, a signet ring which had been his father's, and I have it in my cabinet, not caring overmuch to wear such gauds.

As for Captain Q, he dwelt for many a year in the house we bought for him at Bitterne, across the river. I saw him often; his wits were quite gone, poor gentleman! and he remembered nothing of the strange happenings that brought us together. 'Tis forty years and more since I made a journey to the little village of Quimperlé in Brittany, in hope that I might discover somewhat of the family of one who must have been a notable figure there in his youth. 'Twas a bootless quest. Some of the more ancient inhabitants remembered a young Huguenot named Marcel de Monteray who had fought in the wars of religion, and had been, 'twas said, a captain in the army of Condé; but he had never returned to his native place, and all his kinsfolk were long since dead. Whether Marcel de Monteray and Captain Q were the same person I do not know, and never shall. When I spoke the name in the Captain's hearing it brought nothing to his remembrance. To all Southampton, as to me, he was ever a mysterious personage. As Captain Q he lived, and when his time came to die (and he was then of a very great age), as Captain Q he was buried.

[image]

*tailpiece to First Part***Interim**

My grandfather told me that upon his return, after near a year's absence, his parents' joy was such that they forbore to upbraid and scold him; indeed, they killed for him the fatted calf, as it were, and made much of him. His father was for putting him again to school, but he protested that he had had enough of schooling, and desired nothing more than to follow a man's vocation. Thereto his father consented, provided he first kept a term or two at one of the Inns of Court, and learnt so much of law as would suffice for a justice of the peace when he should have come to man's estate.

It was in the summer after his return that the great fleet upon which the King of Spain had spent so much pains and treasure came at last to invade our shores; and my grandfather, being then at home, hied him to Southampton, to learn the course of its progress. He watched enviously the English vessels sail out from the haven, even the smacks and shallops being filled with young lads and gentlemen of the county eager to bear their part in the fray, or at the least to witness the unequal combat between the cumbersome great vessels of the Spaniards and the light, nimble ships that my Lord Howard commanded, with his lieutenants Drake and Hawkins and Frobisher and the rest. To serve with those great seamen was not permitted him, but he accompanied Sir George Carey when he ran out in a pinnace on the night of July 24, and found himself, as he wrote, "in the midst of round shot, flying as thick as musket-balls in a skirmish on land." But for the strict command of his father, doubtless he would have followed the Armada up the Channel, and beheld how it was stung and cheviéd, and finally discomfited in the Calais roads.

About twelve months thereafter, claiming the fulfilment of his father's promise, he joined himself to the company that his friend and captain Hilary Rawdon was raising for service under King Henry of Navarre, whose fortunes were at that time at a turning point. King Henry III, his cousin, had fallen to the assassin's knife, and Henry of Navarre should then have ascended the throne of France; but he was of the Huguenot party, and the Catholic League was bent upon crushing the Huguenots and excluding Henry from the enjoyment of his heritage. The army of the League, commanded by the Duke of Mayenne, held Paris; and

Henry, desiring to put an end to the religious struggle that rent France asunder, and to make himself master of a united kingdom, saw himself constrained to fight for his crown. His army was choice and sound, but small, and in his extremity he sought the help of Queen Elizabeth, who sent him aid in money and men, and permitted gentlemen to enlist voluntarily under his flag. Many flocked to him, both as upholding his rightful cause, and from the love of adventure, and hatred of the Spaniards, with whom the Leaguers were in alliance. At that time my grandfather, his age being but eighteen, was moved rather by the latter considerations than by the former, though in after years the justice of a cause held ever the foremost place in his mind.

Henry of Navarre had broken up the siege of Paris and withdrawn with his army into Normandy, hoping thereby to tempt the Duke of Mayenne to follow him, and so enforce him to a decisive battle. Mayenne, on his side, issuing forth from the city, had sworn to drive the Bearnais into the sea, or to bring him back in chains. Such was the posture of affairs when that adventure befell my grandfather which I set down as he told it me, as now follows.

THE SECOND PART

CHRISTOPHER RUDD'S ADVENTURE IN FRANCE,
AND HIS BORROWING OF THE WHITE PLUME
OF HENRY OF NAVARRE

[image]

headpiece to Second Part

I

When I survey the backward of my life, and con over its accidents and adventures, my thoughts are drawn as by a magnet to one point of time—the moment

when, through mirk and darkness, benighted in a strange place, I saw the glimmer of a light.

'Twas as foul a night as ever I saw: the sky black as Erebus; the wind howling like unnumbered poor lost souls; the rain, that smote me full in the face as I rode, stinging my flesh as each particular drop were a barb of fire. I pulled my cloak about me, and bent low over the pommel, to gain some shelter from the storm; but little comfort had I thereby, for the rain beat in betwixt my neck and the collar, and, moreover, my horse's hoofs cast up a plentiful bespattering of mud from the sodden road.

My outer man being thus discommoded, I was yet more ill at ease in my mind, for I had some little while suspected, and was now assured, that I had lost my way. I had ridden that road but once before, when I made one of Hilary Rawdon's troop that he took from Dieppe on outpost duty to St Jacques. By this time, according to my recollection, I should have come to the Bethune river, by whose bank the road runs nearly straight to Arques; but having met with some hindrance in my journey, night had overtaken me or ever I was aware, and with the darkness came the sudden bursting of the storm. What with the one and the other I could not doubt that I had strayed into one of the by-roads about Dampierre, and was now as helpless as a mariner without compass or glimpse of star.

I was musing how best to escape out of this pother when, on a sudden lifting of my head, I saw upon my left hand, level with my eyes, the blurred twinkle of the light. With a muttered benediction I turned my horse's head towards it, resolved, whether it shone from prince's mansion or shepherd's cot, to beg shelter there until the fury of the storm was abated. But I had not ridden above five yards before I found myself checked by a quickset hedge, the which made me to dismount and lead my horse up and down, seeking for some gate or gap whereby I might approach the light. Within a little my groping hand taught me that the hedge was neighbour to a low wall, and searching further, I knew that the wall was ruinous, the top being ragged and uneven where bricks or stones had fallen away. Then, touching a gatepost, and so learning that the gate was removed, I was on the point of leading my horse through the gap when my good genius whispered a hint of caution. Hilary Rawdon had dispatched me back on an errand of moment to the King; I should prove but a sorry messenger if, for my comfort's sake, I ran into any peril; 'twas meet that I should first find out what manner of house this was; for all I could tell, it might harbour an enemy. With this thought I led my horse across the lane ('twas no more), and coming after a few paces to a clump of trees, I hitched his bridle to a bough, took a pistol from the holster, and made my way afoot through the mire towards the beacon light.

The mud lay very thick, and there were besides many obstacles in the path,

whereon I stumbled, being unable to see them for the darkness. Nevertheless, I picked my way among them as well as I could, holding my sword close lest it should clash upon a stone, and so came to the house, the which I perceived now to be of a good largeness. The ray shone through a chink in the shutter of a window some few feet above my head. The door was at my left hand, at the top of a flight of steps. Being resolved not to seek admittance until I had learnt somewhat of the inmates, I clambered upon the window-sill, the which being very wide gave me good foothold, and setting my eyes to the chink, I peered into the room.

My eyes were at first dazzled, from so long being in the dark; but within a little I saw two men seated at a table, between me and the light, the which came from two large candles set close together. Their backs were towards me, so that I could not tell with any certainty what manner of men they were; but from their shape I judged them not to be of the labouring kind; and indeed the room, so much of it as I could see, the chink in the shutter being but narrow, appeared to be an apartment of some splendour.

Now I had been sent by Hilary Rawdon to let King Henry know that the Duke of Mayenne was moving towards him from the eastward with a great army, without doubt intending to give him battle, word having been brought to St Jacques by a peasant that the duke was no more than forty miles away. The house whereto I had come could not be above four or five miles from the King's camp at Arques, wherefore it might be supposed that these men were friends of the King. Yet it crossed my mind that they might peradventure be Leaguers, and while I was in any uncertainty I durst not seek shelter with them, nor could I with any conscience proceed on my way. It behoved me, therefore, to make some further discovery, if that were possible, and having no satisfaction in what I had seen, I descended from my perch, and treading very warily, crept along the wall at my right hand, purposing to make the circuit of the house, in the hope to learn something more. By good hap the rain had now ceased, the sky was clearing, and, the month being August, the darkness was not so deep as heretofore; indeed, the stars were now visible, and there was a lightness that seemed to foretell the rising of the moon.

The house was all in darkness, save where I had seen the light. When I came to the corner I saw a smaller building some dozen rods apart, and there, as I passed it, I heard the sound of horses drawing their halters, whereby I guessed it to be the stables. And I perceived now many signs of disorder in the garden—statues overthrown and broken, fragments of wood and porcelain, and other things which led me to believe that the house had lately been put to the sack, and made me go with the more caution. Stealing through the garden to the back of the house, I found a door, which, when I pushed it, yielded an inch or two, but no more, by reason of some barricade behind. A little beyond it, however, I came to a window

hanging loose upon its hinges; and after I had waited a moment to be sure that I was neither seen nor heard, I squeezed my body through, and entered a small room which, when my eyes became accustomed to the dimness, I perceived to be empty. There was a door at the left hand. Holding my sword under my arm, I drew my dagger, and crept across the room to the door, which, when I came to it, I found to be ajar. I pulled it towards me, desisting for a moment when it creaked, and listening, with a fear that the sound might have been heard. But there was nothing to alarm me, and having opened the door just so wide as that I might pass through, I came out into a long wide hall, which I could not doubt led to the chief entrance.

Here I paused, as well to recover breath—for my excitement had winded me—as to listen again. From my right came the low rumble of voices, and in an interval of silence I heard on my left hand, towards the main entrance, as I guessed, the sound of deep breathing as of a man asleep. Though the storm had ceased, there was still a slight moaning of the wind as its gusts took the eaves, and trusting to this to shroud my movements, I crept along the passage in the direction whence I had heard the voices, which came more clearly to my ear, yet muffled, as I advanced. Thus I arrived at a door on my left hand, and perceiving this to be open, I entered very stealthily, and saw that I was in a large and lofty chamber divided in two by a curtain.

I heard the voices yet more clearly now, but not distinctly, so that I could not catch the words. There were one or two shafts of light coming through the curtain, which when I ventured to draw near to it I found to be old and torn. Peeping through a rent that was just below the level of my head, I saw, not two men, but four, seated at the table, all masked, and wearing, as I perceived in the case of the two men whose faces were towards me, their cloaks being thrown back, the cuirasses of men of war. I listened very eagerly, to catch something of their discourse, but they were at a good distance from me, and spoke in low tones, so that I heard but a word here and there, and could not by any means piece them together. This irked me not a little, but I durst not part the curtain, for then I should have been in full view of the men on the further side of the table, whose backs I had seen when I peeped through the shutter; and I was troubled, also, by having, as it were, to strain one ear towards them and the other towards the man at the end of the hall, who might wake at any moment and, for all I knew, come to this very room. So in much impatience and fearfulness I listened, and went hot and cold when I caught the word "Bearnais," for that was the name by which the Leaguers called the King, and I had reason to suspect by this that these men were no friends of his. And by and by I heard other names, "Rosny" and "Biron," the King's friends, and then all again became confused, until one of the two that had their faces from me leant back in his chair, lifting his arms above his head as

if to stretch himself, and said very clearly, and yet without raising his voice: "It were easy to snare the game, but the keepers are wary."

While I was still wondering what these words might mean, and vague surmise was making me uneasy, I heard very faintly the neighing of a horse, and a moment afterwards an answering whinny, but this much louder. The men had given over talking, and he that had last spoken still lay back in his chair, with his hands clasped behind his head, and so he remained while a man might count ten. Then of a sudden he straightened himself, flinging his hands apart, and leant across the table, and said: "The second horse is in the open." The men over against him looked at each other, their eyes glittering strangely through the masks, and I waited to see no more, for I could not doubt that the second horse was my own, and it was time for me to go. As quickly as I might, yet with great quietness, I stepped across the room towards the door, and had but just got myself out into the hall when I heard the grating sound of chairs pushed back as when men rise in a hurry, and saw a light flash through the doorway as the curtain was parted. With my heart in my mouth I fled on tiptoe along the hall and into the room I had first entered, and had not even time to close the door behind me when the men passed, their spurs ringing as they trod. I heard them come to the great door, and one of them kick the sleeping sentry, and then the door was thrown open with a mighty creaking, and I knew that they were betwixt me and my horse.

In a moment I skipped out by the window, delaying just so long as sufficed to replace it as it had first hung, and being now outside, stood to consider of my course. I saw with thankfulness that the sky had again become clouded, so that all was now near as dark as before. Men were calling to one another in the garden, and since they could hardly as yet have discovered the whereabouts of my horse, I thought I could do no better than make my way back as straightly as I could to the clump of trees where I had left him, trusting to luck and the darkness. I had gone but a few steps when I stumbled against a man, and believed myself undone; but he said: "Do you see anything?" and composing my voice I answered: "Nothing," and then left him and sped on, scarce believing in my good fortune. So with many a stumble and shrewd knock upon my shins, making all haste yet moving with such quietness as was possible, I came to the wall, and without waiting to seek the gateway I scrambled over, and fell upon my face in the mud. For this I cared nothing, only that in my fall my sword clashed against a stone, and a shout from the enclosure warned me that the alarm was given. I was on my feet in a trice, and sprang across the lane, in desperate fear lest my horse might whinny again and bring the enemy upon me ere I could loose him and mount. In my agitation of mind I could not remember whether the clump of trees was on my right hand or my left, but a break in the flying scud gave me so much light as to show me what I sought, and I had just reached it and was plunging through the

undergrowth when I heard the clash of steel as the men scrambled over the wall like as I had done, and their voices calling one to another as they asked whether they saw any man.

So dark was it in the copse that I could not see my horse, and I doubt whether I should have found him in time if he, hearing my approach, had not whinnied and so led me in the right direction. I unloosed his bridle in haste, but had no sooner vaulted into the saddle than a man ran up behind me, and cried out to the others that he had me. I set spurs to my horse, but at the moment of his springing forward I felt a sharp pang in the calf of my left leg, and the man let forth a vehement oath when the horse carried me beyond his reach. Bending low in the saddle to shun the branches of the trees, the which swept my cheeks and dealt me many smarting wounds, I put my horse to the gallop, incommoded by finding that one of my stirrups was gone, and knowing never a whit whether I was riding towards Arques or from it. I came out of the copse into a road, and hearing no sounds of pursuit,—indeed scarce expecting any, since the men were not mounted—I gave the horse his head, and breasting an incline we came to a small hamlet, where I did not scruple to knock at one of the cottages until a window was opened, and a peasant sleepily demanded what I lacked. From him I learnt that I was but a stone's throw from the Bethune river, which gave me great comfort, and so I spurred on, and by and by came to the bridge by Archelles, and so on until I gained the marshy plain below Arques where the King was encamped, never stopping until I was challenged by the outposts.

[image]

I FELT A SHARP PANG IN THE CALF OF MY LEFT LEG

The day was now breaking, and since my news was important—both that which I brought from Hilary Rawdon and that which I had discovered for myself—I demanded to be led instantly to Rosny, with whom I had some slight acquaintance, having been commended to him in a letter by my Lord Seymour when I joined Hilary Rawdon's troop. Rosny at first seeing me broke into a fit of laughter, the which was not to be wondered at, seeing that my garments were drenched through and through, and my face was muddy both from splashes and from my fall, and withal I walked somewhat stiffly from the wound in my leg. But he looked grave enough when I told him in brief what news I carried, and he would have me accompany him at once to the King, whom he doubted not to find already astir, though the morning was yet young. (I had not then heard the saying of Pope Sixtus V, who foretold that the Bearnais would come off con-

queror because he did not remain so long abed as the Duke of Mayenne at table; but I knew of the King's habit of rising early, the which was indeed a cause of grumbling among the sluggards of his Court.)

King Henry smiled in his beard when Rosny presented me to him, but heard me soberly enough when I gave him Hilary Rawdon's message, to wit, that the Duke of Mayenne was drawing nigh with twenty-five thousand foot and eight thousand horse to give him battle.

"What shall we do against so great a host with our poor three thousand?" said the King to Marshal Biron that stood by. "Ventre-saint-gris! Is it not hard to be a king without a kingdom, a husband without a wife, and a warrior without money?"

Here Rosny said that I had more to tell, and the King, pursing his lips so that his long nose seemed to touch his chin, bade me say on. I told him of my seeing the light, and of all that followed thereafter, saving only the matter of my wound, and when I had done, he said sharply between his teeth—

"Well, what then?"

(His words in truth were "*Mais encore?*" but 'tis meet I turn French into English in telling my story now.)

"I know no more, Sire," I said in answer, "but I suspect the men I saw were Leaguers, and were plotting secretly to seize your person, or to do some other mischief, and 'twere well to send a party to take them, or if that be too late, to go not from the camp without a strong guard."

"What!" cries the King; "shall I cage myself like a song-bird, or tether myself like a drudging ass? Ventre-saint-gris! my dear friends have already counselled me that I seek refuge speedily in your country; but I tell you that while I continue at the head of even a handful of Frenchmen, such counsel 'tis impossible for me to follow. As for plots, a fig for them all! Did I not listen but yesterday to a tale of a plot, as shadowy as yours? There may be such plots afoot; let there be. The assassin of my late cousin will not lack of imitators. But shall we start at shadows, or flee like a cook-wench at sight of a mouse? The men you saw, as like as not, were bandits, discoursing on the spoils they expect to reap from the ambushing of some rich Churchman. Plots! I am aware of the word."

This reception was so little like what I had looked for that I felt abashed and, I own, somewhat ruffled also. The King's courage was known of all men, but I hold that to neglect a warning is not courage, but mere foolhardiness. While I was meditating whether I should urge the matter, the King suddenly hailed a burly man that was riding slowly a few short paces from his tent.

"Hola, Lameray," he said, "send a dozen men to the château of St Aubyn-le-cauf—which is beyond doubt the place of your adventure, Master Rudd—and seize any man you find therein. Master Rudd will tell you more at large," and

with that he turned away, jesting with Rosny.

The man whom the King had called Lameray dismounted from his horse, which I perceived to be much bespattered with mud, and coming towards me with a sort of roll in his gait, he said, in a full, harsh voice—

”Master Rudd will tell me more at large?”

There was certainly something of insolency in his tone, and being already ruffled with the King’s manner of receiving my news, I did not feel very amiably disposed towards this stranger, who looked at me under his beaver with a glance of mockery.

”Master Rudd, if it please him, will tell me more at large,” says the man again, while I was still considering of how I should deal with him.

”You heard the King’s command, Master Lameray—”

”Pardon—De Lameray,” says he, interrupting me.

”De Lameray,” I said, making a bow. ”The château of St Aubyn-le-cauf, your nobility may not be aware, lies something less than two miles along the road towards Dampierre, and if you hurry you may yet be in time to do the King’s bidding.”

”And perhaps Master Rudd would be pleased to accompany me?” he said, smiling upon me.

”No,” I said shortly, and thinking that perhaps his mockery sprang of my dirty and dishevelled aspect, I left him there, and strode away, with a bare acknowledgment of his salutation, to the quarters I had formerly occupied in the camp. There, having bathed and got me into clean raiment, and bound up the wound in my leg, no great matter, and eaten pretty ravenously, I set off to find Raoul de Torcy, who was of my own age, and had been my particular friend ever since I came to France.

”What news of the camp?” I said, after I had greeted him, for having been absent for a fortnight I knew nothing of what had happened of late.

”The question I myself would ask,” he said, ”for I only returned from Paris last night.”

”From Paris?” I said.

”Yes. I set off thither the very day after you left us, having friends there who are also very good friends of the King, and yet know all the counsels of the Leaguers. I rode thence the day before yesterday, bearing news of a plot to kill the King.”

”Another?” I exclaimed.

”I know not what you mean by ’another,’ my friend; but there is assuredly one afoot, and I rode apace with the news, and was chased well-nigh all the way from Paris by a fellow that had the very cut of a Leaguer. But I shook him off yesterday evening, just before the storm broke, and came safe into camp, and

little enough I had for my pains.”

”Why, did the King flout you too?” I asked.

”He laughed, and took it very lightly. ’Another?’ says he, just as you did: ’I hear of plots as regularly as I eat my dinner.’ And then he went off arm in arm with Rosny and paid no more heed to me.”

Whereupon I told him of my own errand, and of what I had seen at the château, and how the King had received me.

”I love our Henry,” said Raoul, with a shrug, when I had made an end; ”but I sometimes question whether he be not too careless to make a good king for France. However, we have done our part; if any ill befalls him, it will not be for want of warning.”

I asked him then who was this Monsieur de Lameray that the King had dispatched to the château, and he said he had never heard the man’s name; but encountering Jean Prévost as we sauntered forth from his lodging, we put the question to him, and he told us that the Baron de Lameray had lately come into the camp and offered his sword to the King, with three score gentlemen well mounted and equipped. He had been a Leaguer, but it was no more uncommon then than now for warriors to shift their allegiance, and Henry, who dearly loved a good sword, had welcomed right heartily this notable accession to his party, and smiled upon him so graciously that certain of his well-trying servants were displeased thereat. Whereupon Raoul shrugged again, complaining of the fickleness of kings’ favour.

II

On the night of that day, I rode with Raoul and a dozen more to the lodging of the Marquis de Contades in Dieppe, he having bidden us to supper and a game of tric-trac. The company was very merry, but I was aweary with having been up all the night before, and what with our host’s good cheer and the heaviness of the air I could scarce keep my eyes open. Ever and anon I wandered to the window to cool myself, wishing with all my heart that the company would break up, whereof I had little hope, such jovial entertainments being commonly prolonged far towards morning. Looking forth one time into the silent and empty street, I saw a shadow move in a doorway on the further side, and felt a passing wonder as to who might be lurking there so late, concluding that ’twas some poor townsman on the lookout to earn a few doits by holding a stirrup or some such petty service. When I returned into the room the marquis rallied me on my air of weariness,

and on my telling him that I had been long without sleep, he was pleased to admit my excuses, and bade me get away to my bed. I went down the stairs very gladly, to walk to the inn where I had left my horse and my servant, and had taken a pace or two before I remembered the shadow in the doorway. I looked up then to see whether the man was still there, and in that very moment a figure sprang at me out of the dark entry, and I saw in the starlight a long dagger uplifted against the sky. I had no time to draw my own weapon, but my lucky remembrance of the man having saved me from being taken wholly by surprise, I dropped suddenly to the ground, and my assailant stumbled over me in the vehemence of his onset. Before he could recover his footing I was upon him, but could do no more than grip his right arm, and we fell together. There we were, rolling over and over, and in the heat and fury of the struggle I heard the footsteps of other men on the cobbles, and a voice asking in a hoarse and breathless whisper which was the Englishman, and another answer: "'Tis no matter; the fool has botched it; strike anywhere!" and then the man I was gripping cried out with pain, for one of the newcomers had stooped and stabbed him, and as he loosened his hold upon me he screamed again, and I knew that in a moment one of these hacking swords must find me out.

[image]

A FIGURE SPRANG AT ME OUT OF THE DARK ENTRY

But as I grappled the assassin to me to shield myself, there came to my ears a shouting and the clink and clatter of spurred boots upon the stones, and three of the four men above me took instantly to their heels. The fourth remained, still bending over us, and I heard his pants, and though I could not see his sword-arm, being partly underneath the body of my first assailant, I saw his other arm, lifted in the act to lunge. The fingers of his hand being distended, in that brief moment I observed that his little finger was amissing.

My companions, called forth by the cries and the sound of the scuffle, now came running up, and the man, with a growl of rage, straightened himself and sped away into the night. I rose, bruised and very scant of breath, and when I told them in a word what had happened, they were for pursuing the villains. But the time, though brief, was sufficient for them to make good their escape, and it was vain to think of overtaking them in the darkness of those streets, with many crooks and corners and narrow alleys; so they came back after going a few paces, and while some asked me whether I was hurt, others bent down to look at the fallen man, who was stark dead. A torch being brought from the marquis's

lodging, they saw the device upon the man's coat, and some one cried that it was one of De Lameray's men. At this Raoul looked at me, and I at him, but we said nothing to our companions, having much food for thought. The party being thus broken up, those of the guests that belonged to the camp at Arques got their horses and rode back with me, and when we arrived at the camp Raoul accompanied me, late as it was, to the lodgings of Rosny, to whom we recounted, when we had roused him up, both what had befallen and what our suspicions were. He heard us gravely, and then bade us get to our beds, saying that the matter must be looked to in the morning.

I was glad enough to seek my couch, and fell asleep instantly; but all on a sudden I awaked and sat up with a start, a strange discovery having come upon me in the midst of my sleep. I was again peeping through the curtain at the château of St Aubyn-le-cauf; again I saw the man leaning back in his chair, and then unclasping his hands as he rose; and now my recollection acquainted me with something which had scarce made any impression at the moment of my actual beholding: the man's left hand had lacked a finger! I could not doubt that the man in the château and he of the late adventure in Dieppe were one and the same; and I had now some inkling of the reason why my life was attempted. *Dead men tell no tales.* My tale was already told, and the King had not hearkened; but I had somewhat new to add to it, and maybe he would not again turn me a deaf ear.

I had but just broken my fast when a lackey came to command my attendance on the King. I found His Majesty with Rosny in his tent, and the Baron de Lameray was there too, and as I entered and made my obeisance he said something under his breath that set the King a-laughing.

"Well, my friend," said Henry, "what is this I hear of tavern brawling in the streets of my good town of Dieppe?"

"I know not what you may have heard, Sire," I said, "nor can I answer for the doings of others; but an attempt was made upon my life last night," and then I told him the whole story as I have told it you.

"And who were these would-be assassins?" asked the King when I had done.

"The fellow that was killed, Sire, was said to wear the livery of my lord here," I replied, glancing towards Lameray; "and as for the others, I know no more than that I saw the hand of one of them, and it lacked a finger."

At this Lameray took a step forward, and glaring very darkly upon me demanded whether I hinted at him. Whereupon I smiled very pleasantly, and glancing at his hands, which were cased in gauntlets, as the manner of the camp was, I said—

"I have not the honour of knowing with what afflictions Providence has been pleased to visit Monsieur de Lameray."

The King laughed, and even Rosny's grave face relaxed a little; but Lameray frowned, and said with some heat: "I have already explained to His Majesty that at the time of this fracas I had not returned from the errand which he was pleased to entrust to me, and of that the gentlemen of my company can bear witness."

"And your château was empty, my good Rudd," said the King.

"I scarce expected otherwise, Sire," I said, "the men having had warning. And as to that matter, it is a slight thing, no doubt, but one of those I saw there had suffered the same misfortune as Monsieur de Lameray, if I take his words aright: he had but three fingers on his left hand."

The King cast a searching glance upon Lameray, who did not change countenance, but said with a sneer—

"It seems that Monsieur Rudd is beset with visions of conspirators lacking a finger. Maybe he is little practised in the use of the sword."

"I wield my sword with the right hand, Monsieur de Lameray," I said; and then the King, whose countenance had regained its wonted serenity, asked me why I had said nought of the three-fingered man when I told him of what I had seen in the château. This question put me in a confusion, for it was an ill matter to explain to the King that his manner of receiving my news had ruffled me, or that the remembrance had not come to me until the middle of the night, for that might very well seem to be a dream, or even an invention. I stammered in this quandary, and, I doubt not, looked as much embarrassed as I felt; and the King laughed somewhat impatiently, and turning to Rosny asked why he troubled him with these brawls and midnight robberies. Without waiting for an answer he bade us depart, vouchsafing to me no word save the bare command, but telling Monsieur de Lameray that he would do well in future to keep his lackeys more firmly in hand.

I returned to my quarters in high indignation, marvelling also at the King's strange simplicity, for I believed now with the utmost assurance that the man I had seen in the château and he I had seen in the street were Monsieur de Lameray and no other. And an hour or two after I found that I was not alone in this suspicion, for Rosny himself came to me and asked me to be wary, and to acquaint him immediately of anything I might see or hear further. "We must put things to the proof," he said in his brief way. When I told him that Hilary Rawdon had expected me to return to St Jacques after accomplishing my errand, Rosny replied that I must not do so, but remain at Arques. "And see that you do not stray from the camp alone, my friend," he said, "if you value your skin as I value mine." And so he left me.

III

It is ill work kicking one's heels in camp when no fighting is toward, and I was glad enough when a servant of Jean Prévost's came to me in the afternoon with a request from his master that I would join him and a few more in a gallop. I donned my doublet—the same which I had worn on the night of my ride—and chancing to put my hand into its inner pocket, I felt some small thing which, when I took it out, I found to be a thin roll of paper. For a brief space I looked at it in a kind of puzzlement, turning it over in my fingers, at a loss to know how I had gotten it. And then, in a flash, it came back to me. I told you that before I lost my way near the château of St Aubyn-le-cauf, I had already met with some hindrance in my journey, and I declare that the surprising events that had happened afterwards had clean driven it from my memory; but now I remembered it perfectly. About two miles out of St Jacques, just as the dusk was falling, and a drizzle of rain, I came to a cross-roads, and saw a man lying in a huddled heap by the roadside. I got off my horse to look more closely at him, and when I bent over him, I saw that he was stretched in a pool of blood, and there were great gashes in his doublet, not such clean cuts as a rapier makes, but jagged rents, the work of coarser instruments. I spoke to him, and he opened his eyes and groaned feebly, and then endeavoured to speak; but he was plainly very far gone, and I could make nothing of his mutterings. I looked around to see if there was any house whereto I might convey the man, who I supposed had been beset by footpads, but there was no dwelling at hand, and I was considering whether I should lift him on to my horse, when he lifted his hand painfully, and gave me a roll of paper. I asked him what it was, and what I should do with it, and he tried to tell me; but though his lips moved no articulate sound came from them, and even as I looked at him he heaved a great sigh, and his head fell back, and I knew that he was dead. What I might have done had not my errand been urgent I cannot tell; but since I could do nothing for him I delayed but to compose his huddled limbs, and mounted my horse again, thrusting the paper into my pocket, where it had since lain forgotten. Such things happened often in the lawless and distracted France of that time, so that it is no wonder it went out of my head when I had matters of greater moment to think of.

[image]

I SAW A MAN LYING IN A HUDDLED HEAP

Having found the paper, I unrolled it to see what it might be. It contained a few words plainly written, and yet I could not read them, for they were of no tongue that ever I heard of, and I was not long in concluding that they were written in what is called a cipher. I rolled the paper again and put it back into my pocket, thinking to show it to Rosny by and by; but meeting Raoul de Torcy as I left my lodging, I spoke of it to him, telling him how I came by it. When I described the poor wretch who had been thus done to death, Raoul said 'twas like the horseman who had followed him from Paris, and begged me to leave the paper with him, for he had some skill in reading ciphers, and guessed that if the man had been a Leaguer, as he supposed, the writing might prove useful to the King.

I rode out with Jean Prévost's party, and after a hard gallop we were walking our horses when we were overtaken by the King himself, with Rosny and half-a-dozen more. The King looked over his shoulder as he rode by, and told me with a laugh that he was going to my château, as he called it, to look for the three-fingered gentleman, or at least to lay the ghost. I did not relish his mockery, nor the quizzing of my companions, who were importunate in asking what he meant, but I forbore to tell them, Rosny having charged me to say nothing of the matter. A little after we turned our horses and rode slowly back.

I had not been above five minutes in my quarters when Raoul burst into my apartment in a great heat, and cried to me that he had read the cipher.

"And what's more," said he, "it was intended for me myself! That poor fellow you found murdered was not a Leaguer after all, but had been dispatched from Paris hot upon my heels by my friends there."

"And what is the message he brought in such haste?" I asked.

"Why, hark to it," he said, thereupon reading from the paper: "'The mischief purposed against the King will be wrought by a feigning friend, who has lately joined himself to the royal forces. We do not yet know his name, but will acquaint you with that as soon as it is discovered.' Who should that be but Lameray?"

"Where is Lameray?" I cried instantly, remembering that the King had ridden out but sparsely attended, so that if it was designed to seize him no better opportunity could present itself. When Raoul told me that he had not seen the baron all that day I sprang up in haste, saying that it were well we should make inquiry; and calling to my servant to saddle my best horse, I went out with Raoul to seek Charles de Martigny, who knew everything. From him we learnt that Lameray had ridden forth some while before with his troop to hunt in the forest of Arques across the river. Martigny remarked some excitement in our demeanour, and asked whether I had some new grudge against the baron; whereupon I told him what we had learnt, saying when I ended, "'Tis to be hoped he is hunting fair game."

"We must go and acquaint Rosny," said Martigny at once.

"Rosny has ridden out with the King—to lay the ghost of the three-fingered man," I said, with a kind of scorn.

"What!" cried he. "To St Aubyn-le-cauf? That is not far from the forest of Arques."

"True," said I coolly.

"And the King may be at this moment in the extremity of danger," he cried. "What you will do I know not, but as for me, I go straight to Biron and ask him to gather a troop and ride out instantly to defend the King."

"And be snubbed for your pains," said I, telling him then of the warnings I had already given. "We should be admirable laughing-stocks for the camp," I added, "did we discover a mare's nest again."

This had some weight with both of them, for a Frenchman of all men loves not to appear ridiculous. We concluded then to say nothing as yet to Biron, but to ride across the river, we three together, and see for ourselves the manner of Lameray's hunting. Within a few minutes we set forth, and as we descended the further side of the bridge of Archelles, we perceived far away a cloud of dust on the road that skirted the forest, and it moved in the direction of St Aubyn-le-cauf. It was plainly caused by a numerous body of horsemen, and the same thought flashed in the minds of all of us: Monsieur de Lameray's hunting expedition was a mere blind, and he was now riding to seize the King. That very instant I set spurs to my horse and galloped down the road that ran alongside the river, which would bring me to the château sooner than Lameray, I hoped, even though he had the start of me, he following a more winding road, and remoter from the camp. The King should at least be warned, and if this third time he slighted the warning, or it were proved needless—well, I could but swallow my chagrin, and resolve to mind my own business for the future. My two companions galloped after me, but I soon began to outstrip them, my steed being a noble beast of Arab strain, and, indeed, the envy of the camp. Seeing them left behind, so that they could not hope to be first with the news, I turned in my saddle and called to Martigny that he might now go to Biron, and let him bring out a company if he chose. Martigny, who was in some dudgeon, as I could see, because he could not overtake me, reined up and turned back towards the camp; but Raoul held on his course, and he being my particular friend, I allowed him to come up with me, and we galloped on together. I was glad of his company, for he knew of a short cut across the fields, and we sped on, leaping walls and ditches at some peril of our horses' knees, until we breasted a hillock, and saw the château lying amid its gardens half a mile away. And at that same moment, far to the left, we caught the glint of the setting sun upon a line of steel helmets, making at full speed towards the same goal as ourselves. Luckily we were nearer, and putting our horses to a fierce gallop down the slope, we came betimes to the château, where we expected

to find the King.

But when we entered there was no man there, and we were thinking that we had had our ride for nought, when, looking from a window, we saw Henry's white plume nodding among his company as he approached leisurely from the direction of Dampierre. 'Twas plain he had no suspicion of danger, and I was in a ferment lest Lameray should fall upon him before he could gain what shelter the château afforded. I ran out immediately and leapt upon my horse's back, and flew like the wind to meet the King. As soon as I came to him I poured out my news in a breathless flood, and he laughed right heartily; but at this Rosny clutched at his bridle, and saying sternly, "Are you mad, Sire?" he made his own horse gallop, fairly lugging the King's along with him.

"Can we defend the garden?" Rosny whispered to me as I rode close beside him. I reminded him that the walls were ruinous and there was no gate, and he pressed his lips together and frowned with that fixed look he had when confronted by a difficulty. We said no more, and presently coming to the garden wall at the back, we found Raoul there, having opened a small wicket-gate for us, and he cried to us to haste, Lameray being not a quarter-mile up the lane. We passed through one by one, the gate being not wide enough for two—eleven of us in all—and then Henry, who, careless and pleasure-loving as he was, was yet quick in counsel and swift in action, asked whether the great door was open. When Raoul said it was, the King bade us all ride our horses after him up the steps into the great hall, the which we had but just done, Rosny being the last to enter, when Lameray and his men came pouring through the gateway from the lane. We slammed the door in great haste, and slid the bolts, the King with great readiness commanding some to bolt the shutters of the windows also, and to see what could be done to defend every part of the house. And having given this order he removed his hat and his purple cloak and set them on the table in the very room where I had seen the men, and catching sight of me as I slipped a bar into its place at the window, he swore his customary oath, and said, very pleasantly but with a touch of malice—

"I shall owe you something for making me sweat, my good Rudd, if this turns out to be another of your hallucinations."

Before I could frame my lips to any reply, there was a hammering at the great door and a voice demanding admittance.

"Ask him what brings him here," said the King to Rosny, who went accordingly to the porter's wicket beside the door, and opening the shutter demanded to know who knocked and what his errand was. Spying through a loophole of the shutter of my window I saw that the space in front of the château was thronged with horsemen, in number full sixty, all armed and accoutred.

"'Tis I, the Baron de Lameray," cried the full harsh voice.

"And your errand, Monsieur de Lameray?" said Rosny.

"That, with your leave, Monsieur de Rosny, is for the ears of my master the King alone."

"Tell him he may come in—alone," said the King, with a chuckle.

Rosny delivered the message, adding of his own motion that the door should not be opened until the baron had removed his men beyond the wall. At this, Lameray broke forth in indignation, demanding to know whether the King mistrusted him, and Rosny vouchsafing no answer, he stood for a space gnawing his lip, and then, casting a sharp and furious glance over the front of the house, the which was shuttered in all its lower part, he turned swiftly about and led his men out through the gateway. The King laughed, and bade us throw open the shutters, and when Rosny began to remonstrate with him he smote his thigh and cried, "Ventre-saint-gris! Dost think I will be mewed up here as though I were a craven?" Accordingly we opened the shutters, and the King began to march up and down the floor, expecting Monsieur de Lameray to return on foot. And within a minute we saw the baron coming alone through the gateway, and the King commanded that the door should be opened to him; but before this could be done, Raoul de Torcy ran down-stairs from an upper room whence he had been watching all that passed outside, and cried that the men, having tethered their horses in the copse beyond the lane (the same where I had left my horse on that night) were creeping round the wall towards the back of the house. And then Henry's face took on a wonderful sternness, and bidding Rosny still leave the door closed, he sent all of us but two to keep a watch upon the back until he should summon us. He called to me as I was going, and said, "I will borrow one of your pistols, my friend," being unarmed save for his sword.

We went to take up our posts, I directing myself with Raoul to the window through which I had made an entrance. 'Twas plain we could not defend it, for the shutters as well as the window itself hung loose upon their hinges. We therefore determined to quit that room and raise a barricade against its door that opened into the great hall. We were hauling tables and chairs to set against it when we heard Lameray again speaking through the porter's wicket, saying that his errand brooked no delay, and asking that the King would himself come to the door and speak with him.

"Open the door and let him in," cried the King, with a smile.

Rosny began to draw the bolts, but at the same instant there was a marvellous heavy thud upon the back door, whose timbers groaned and creaked, and as Raoul and I ran to it to see whether its fastenings would hold we heard a shot, and immediately afterwards the slamming of the shutter of the porter's wicket, and some one cried that Lameray had fired at Rosny, who, however, expecting something of the sort, had kept himself out of harm's way and was not touched.

'Twas plain that Lameray and his ruffians were resolved to put all to the hazard, and I doubt not that the Duke of Mayenne had promised them a very great reward if they should either kill the King or take him alive. And I own I quaked with fear lest they should accomplish their purpose, for we were but eleven, and they sixty or more, and the defences of the place were so paltry that it would be nothing short of a miracle if we kept them out.

By this time the shutters of the front windows had been closed and fastened again, so that the house was in darkness save for a little light that came from the upper floor. While some of our party were hasting to pile barricadoes against the doors leading into the hall, their work being greatly incommoded by the presence of the horses, I bethought me that we might do some damage among the enemy by firing at them out of an upper window. Accordingly I ran up the stairs by myself, and found that there was but one window opening on the back of the house, where the attack was being made, Lameray knowing very well that this side was not able to withstand a stout assault. I stood at the window for a little to comprehend what was proceeding beneath, and saw a crowd of men gathered about the door, and others entering the window into the room I had crossed on my way to the hall. Then, bending forward, I fired my pistol into the midst of the throng, which instantly fell apart, one man dropping to the ground, and Lameray shouting to the rest to save themselves and enter by the window. They did his bidding, but very soon I saw some issue forth and seize upon one of the broken statues that strewed the garden, and this they proceeded to carry through the window into the room, designing, as I guessed, to employ it as a battering ram against the inner door. I had charged my pistol again, and firing just as the last of the men entered, I was lucky enough to hit his right arm, which fell useless at his side.

Since I could now do no more above, I hastened back to the hall, and knew by the shouts and the blows upon the door that the enemy were making a very vigorous assault upon it. I knew that the timbers could not long endure so mighty a battering, and the barricado that we had raised against it would prove itself a very sorry defence. But the King, who was perfectly calm, and wore as serene a countenance as if he were playing a sett at tennis, stood in the midst of the hall, speaking brief words of cheer; and ever and anon our little party fired their pistols through the door, setting the muzzles close to the timber, not without effect, as we knew by the groans and cries from without. There came answering shots, the enemy desisting from their battering for this purpose, and first a horse near me screamed most pitifully, and then the *Sieur de Langres* gave one choking sigh, and fell at the King's feet with a bullet in his breast.

"Courage, my friends!" cried the King. "They have us in a trap, but they shall not get us until we have slain four for one."

[image]

*THE SIEUR DE LANGRES GAVE ONE CHOKING SIGH, AND FELL
AT THE KING'S FEET*

"Navarre! Navarre!" we shouted in consort, the hall ringing with our cries, and from beyond the door we heard confused shouts of "Guise! Mayenne! Lam-eray!"

I observed that Rosny stood in front of the King, to protect him, which the King remarking, he plucked Rosny by the sleeve and said, in a gay and easy tone, "Nay, nay, mon cher, what says the Psalmist? 'The Lord is my shield and buckler.' Wouldst usurp the prerogative of the Almighty?" Rosny stepped aside at the King's urging, and I told him that Martigny had ridden back to warn the Marshal de Biron, and if we could only hold out for yet a little, I made no doubt the marshal would come with a troop sufficient to put our enemies to the rout. But at that moment, as if to mock my words, there was a loud crack, and we knew that the woodwork of the door was giving way. By good hap a heavy table stood at the place where the board was splintered, so that it was not driven in; and four of our party firing together through the door, we heard cries of pain mingled with the jubilant shouts which had hailed this breach in our defences.

But it was very plain that we could resist but little longer, and unless Biron should come within a few minutes, our case would be desperate indeed. In a fever of trouble I strove to think of some way whereby we might save the King, for I believed then, and I know now, that the loss of so great a man would have been a sore calamity for France and the world. And as I beat my wits on this matter, on a sudden I chanced to remember Henry's hat and cloak that lay on the table in the great salon, and a device rushed into my mind. I durst not tell the King, who would assuredly have forbid it; but I drew Rosny aside, and whispered it to him. A light beamed upon his troubled face, and he bade me go, but secretly, lest the King should observe me. Accordingly I sought my friend Raoul, and desired him to draw the bolts of the great door as silently as might be, and to be ready to throw it open at a word. And then I crept into the salon, and taking the plumed hat and cloak from the table I donned them, and returned into the hall. Meanwhile Rosny had informed the King that Biron had been warned, and had led him up the stairs to a window in the front of the house, whence they might overlook a great space of the country and peradventure spy the marshal coming. The way being thus cleared for me, I mounted my horse, there in the hall, and giving Raoul the word, he flung the door open, and I dashed out, my horse leaping the steps at one stride.

The enemy were all at the rear part of the house, so that there was none to see me as I galloped at a headlong pace towards the lane. But as I passed the stables they caught sight of me, as I designed they should, and then there was such a yell of consternation and rage as I had never heard before. A shot flew after me, but fell short, and in a trice I swept through the gateway, wheeled suddenly to the left, and set my horse to an easy canter, for it was not part of my plan to gallop clean away. I heard the shouts of the men as they swarmed after me, and turning in my saddle, yet keeping my face pretty well concealed, I saw them scurry into the copse where their horses were tethered, Lameray first among them. The dusk of evening and an autumn haze hung over the ground, so that I had good hope they would be deceived by the plume and the cloak, and not observe that the form thus clad was not that of Henry of Navarre, but of his humble servant Christopher Rudd.

I had ridden but a few hundred yards up the lane when they came dashing out of the copse after me, Lameray again the first. And now that I had drawn them into pursuit, as I had purposed, I gave my good horse his head, and galloped on at a round pace. Soon I left the lane, leaping the hedge into a field, not for easiness of going, but to entice the enemy after me, and thereby give the King the opportunity of riding forth with his party and reaching camp before me. The hunt followed my lead with excellent witlessness; taking a flying look at them I perceived that nearly every man of them was joining in the chase; and my blood tingles now, old man as I am, when I remember the joy that leapt in my veins as I rode, springing over hedges and ditches, the pack in full cry after me. Verily I believe that my horse was as merry as I myself, though he may have wondered where was the fox, not knowing that I myself was the quarry of that hunt.

My steed, as I have said, was the envy of the camp, and at the pace whereto I set him he soon outdistanced all the pursuers save only Lameray, who bestrode a fine roan but little less in value than my own horse. One by one the others dropt off, but he still kept within the same distance of me, and I wondered whether he would have the temerity to pursue me up to the very skirts of the camp and perchance into the arms of Biron. Glancing over my shoulder (yet careful to shield my face with my arm), I saw that a dyke I had just leapt had been too much for every one of my pursuers but him, and recollecting his insolency towards me, and the attempt on my life, and above all, his slur upon my swordsmanship, I resolved to try conclusions with him, and prove upon his body the foul traitor he was. Accordingly I put my horse at a low wall, barely clearing an unexpected ditch that lay beyond it, and reining up, wheeled about and awaited my enemy a dozen yards upon the further side. He came up at a wild and reckless pace, and, traitor though he was, I could not but admire the dexterity of his manage as he leapt the wall at the very place of my crossing. Seeing me bidding for him,

with no care now to shroud my countenance, he drew his sword at the moment of leaping, and came at me in a fury. But his horse lost a little speed in taking the ditch, and since I set spurs to mine as soon as Lameray's alighted, we met with a mighty shock, and my steed being lighter than his was forced back upon his haunches. In this manner I escaped the point of his sword outthrust towards me, and causing my horse to swerve, I heard Lameray's snarl of rage as he was carried a few paces beyond. In a twinkling he was about, and lifting his sword high above his head, he brought it down with a vehement stroke that, had it touched me, would assuredly have cleft my head in twain, or my arm from the shoulder. But my good steed answered perfectly to the pressure of my heel upon his flank, and swerving, saved me by a hair's breadth. And then, at the same moment that I heard a great shouting far away, I lunged swiftly, and by good hap my point entered his throat. With one dreadful sob he fell backwards over the crupper, and the traitor was no more.

[image]

*RAISING HIS SWORD HIGH ABOVE HIS HEAD, HE BROUGHT IT
DOWN WITH A VEHEMENT STROKE*

It needs not to tell how Biron, with three-score of his choicest cavaliers, rode out from camp with Martigny, having lost some little time in saddling, and came full upon a portion of Lameray's troop just as they returned to the lane. The King and his little band having sallied forth, and being on the further side of them, they were shut up as in a vice, and full two-score of them were slain. Nor does it become me to relate all that King Henry said to me when he sought me out, I having ridden straight into Arques when I had taken Lameray's sword as a trophy. I might, if I chose, write myself the Baron de St Aubyn in the peerage of France, since thus royally did the King see fit to reward me; but having been born an Englishman I have no great love for outlandish titles, though, maybe, if I enjoyed a marquis's rank I might not be so squeamish. Go to my cabinet yonder; there you will find, set together in one place, a white plume, a cloak, and a sword. These the King was pleased to give me. Peradventure in years to come, when your grandsons visit you, you will set these relics in state before them, and tell over again the story of the lonely château and the Baron de Lameray.

Interim

[image]

tailpiece to Second Part

A few days after this notable adventure, the Duke of Mayenne encamped over against Arques, and made sundry assaults upon King Henry's entrenchments, being baffled at all points. Then, hearing that new forces were drawing near from the east, and that five thousand good English soldiers were upon the sea, he withdrew himself into Picardy, the King marching close upon his heels up to the very walls of Paris, the suburbs whereof he took, and gave over to pillage. But winter coming on, he stayed not to open a siege, but withdrew to Tours, sallying forth thence when he heard that Mayenne was again afoot. Many strong places in Normandy yielded themselves up to him, and in the middle of March in the next year he gave battle to Mayenne at Ivry, where, when Fortune seemed to be turning against him, he called cheerfully upon his nobles and gentlemen, and they following him charged into the thick of the fray, his white plume waving in the midst. And among the thirty horsemen that came forth with him out of the mellay was my grandfather, who bore ever after on his neck the scar of a sword cut dealt him on that glorious day.

After this victory my grandfather accompanied the King in his march upon Paris, to which city Henry laid siege, straitly shutting it up all that summer, so that they lacked food, and devoured horses and asses, dogs and rats, and even little balls of clay and powdered bones. But the Duke of Parma coming out of the Low Countries with an army of Spaniards, the King was enforced to strike his camp and haste to meet this doughty foe. Nevertheless there was no battle betwixt them, for Henry was in no wise strong enough to match the Duke, nor indeed was he equal to him in the art of war, though none could be bolder or more daring in the field. Being therefore outdone, he drew back his forces, and the city was opened to the Spaniards, who threw into it a plenty of victuals and lifted the people out of their misery.

It were too long to tell of all the skirmishes, the marchings and counter-marchings, the captures and surprises, wherein my grandfather bore his part for three years from that time. But in July 1593, the King professed himself of the Catholic faith, to the joy of the greater part of the nation, and the confusion of his enemies. City after city opened its gates to him; by the end of that year France had peace, and many of the English gentlemen that had fought for the King returned to their own country, my grandfather being among them. He told me that the main cause of his return was Queen Elizabeth's displeasure with Henry for

that he had changed his religion, but it is known that the Queen nevertheless withdrew not her support from him, and methinks my grandfather himself no longer held him in the same degree of respect, for he abhorred a turncoat, and I know that he grieved because, as all men knew, the King forsook his faith without sincerity and for the mere bauble of a crown. My father was used to remind him how Naaman the Syrian bowed himself in the house of Rimmon, and is held of many to be blameless; and how King Henry did in truth by his conversion compose the French nation to peace and order; whereat my grandfather would cry, "How now! would you do ill that good may come?" and so put him to silence.

However, having returned to London, my grandfather obtained by the interest of a noble friend the promise of a place among the Queen's Guard. Yet it was some while ere he entered into this honourable office, for being sent by my Lord Burghley upon an errand to Flanders, he was led by chance, or more truly by the hand of Providence, to employ his sword in defence of the liberties of the commonweal there. The Provinces had been struggling for five and twenty years against the oppression of the Spanish King and his minions, of whom the Duke of Alva in especial left a name for iron sternness and cruelty. Like as in the case of King Henry of Navarre, Queen Elizabeth lent aid to the suffering folk; many of her chiefest men were captains in their army, and became governors of their towns, and did many right honest and praiseworthy deeds in their behoof. And among the stories that my grandfather told me, none pleased me better than this that now follows, wherein he relates a quaint and pleasant conceit that he devised for the undoing of a traitor.

THE THIRD PART

CHRISTOPHER RUDD'S ADVENTURE IN THE
LOW COUNTRIES, AND HIS QUAIN
T DEVICE OF THE SILVER SHOT

[image]

headpiece to Third Part

I

I could wish that I had been born somewhat earlier into the world, for then I had had no cause, in these my latter years, to feel shame for my country, nor to look into the future with any disquietude. This our England stood upon a pinnacle of renown and majesty that year when the Spaniards' Armada was shattered by the winds of God and the shot of Sir Francis Drake. Queen Elizabeth went down to her grave in a blaze of glory; but in the reign of her successor the lustre of our name was dimmed. At this present the sky is black with clouds, and there is rumbling and muttering of thunder. Pray God our Ship of State may weather the imminent storm!

Chiefly I could wish to have been of an elder generation, because then I might have had a full share in that great struggle for liberty which our neighbours of the Low Countries long time maintained with stout heart against the Spaniard. I did, indeed, ply my sword in their behoof, among the voluntaries whom our queen suffered to engage in that service; but I came late to it, when a great part of the journey work was already done. Prince William, named the Silent, had fallen to the assassin's knife while I was yet at school; and by the hand of that pattern of all princely virtues the foundations of the Republic had been well and truly laid. Yet had he bequeathed a vast heritage of toil to his son, Prince Maurice, whom I must hold to be the peerless instructor of this age in the art of war. By his side I dealt many a dint for freedom, and it would need a month of talking so much as to tell over the sieges and stratagems, the ambushades and sharp encounters, wherein I bore my part with that worthy prince. But at the very beginning of my service there befell me a noteworthy adventure which I look back upon with a certain joyous contentment; and that I will relate, craving your patience.

In the autumn of 1593 I was sent for one day to wait upon my Lord Burghley at Cecil House in the Strand. I found him exceeding sick in body, with a look of death upon his aged countenance; but his mind was sound and firm as ever, and he laid his commands upon me with all his wonted clearness and precision.

I had but lately quit the service of His Majesty of France. The Queen, my mistress, bore so ill King Henry's submission to the Roman Church as she could not endure the continuance of any of her servants in his employment. Thus I chanced to be for the nonce at large, and ready for the charge the Lord Treasurer committed to me.

Since the villainous treachery of Sir William Stanley and Sir Rowland Yorke in delivering the town of Deventer to the Spaniards, the Netherlanders had harboured a natural suspicion and distrust of the good faith of our English captains. Especially was there a present dread lest the town of Ostend should be betrayed

by its English garrison. To clear our fame of this withering blight, the Queen had determined to admonish Sir Edward Norris, governor of that place, bidding him to keep a wary watch upon his captains and soldiers, to enforce them rigorously in their duty, and to hang up without remorse any that should be discovered in communication with the enemy. To this end she indited with her own hand a letter to Sir Edward, the which, together with his own formal despatch, the Lord Treasurer delivered to me for conveyance to Flanders.

This was a charge that jumped well with my inclination. I had no love for the soft air of courts or the mincing manners of a carpet knight, and having learnt from my Lord Burghley that, my errand being accomplished, the Queen would not stay me from serving Prince Maurice, I took passage very willingly in a hoy bound for Flushing, where I landed some time in the month of October.

It needs not to tell of my journey to Ostend and my meeting with Sir Edward Norris. Having delivered to him my letters, I departed as soon as with good manners I might, and, accompanied only by my servant, took my way to the camp of Sir Francis Vere, the principal general of our English levies since my Lord Leicester departed from the Low Countries. Sir Francis greeted me right boisterously, and put a troop of horse immediately at my command.

'Tis a matter well established that a man may have all the qualities of a captain and leader of men, and yet lack those higher parts that are requisite in a general. Sir Francis was in person the very image and model of a man of war. Of good stature, with a well-knit body and a princely countenance, his hair close-clipped and his brown beard spread spade-shaped upon his breast, he made a noble figure in his Milan corselet inlaid with gold and his ruff of point-lace. Bold and resolute in action, he was nevertheless heady, prone to anger, and full of whimsies, whereby in great affairs he was apt to be looked on with a certain mistrust, both in the council and in the field. I had not been long with him before I perceived that he entertained a most violent hatred and jealousy of Prince Maurice, and looked upon the Netherlanders with a sour contempt.

I learnt from him the posture of affairs in the Low Countries at that time. The Spaniards had of late taken sundry strong places of note, and were closely investing sundry others. Prince Maurice, being but ill provided, could do little towards the relief of those beleaguered towns, and while gathering strength thereto held himself mainly to the defensive. This loitering and idleness provoked Sir Francis to wrath, who would chafe and chide, and avouch that 'twould be profitable to the country if the whole breed of Nassaus were rid out of the way.

It chanced that one day I sallied forth with a handful of men towards a small city then besieged by the Spaniards, to discover if I might the strength and disposition of the enemy. For reasons that will presently appear I had liever not

tell the true name of this place, but will call it Bergen.

We rode forth one misty afternoon, and picked our way not without trouble among the runnels and made watercourses wherewith that flat and marshy land abounds. Perceiving no sign of the enemy, I was tempted to approach more closely to their lines than consorted with prudence. As we rode by a narrow bridle path betwixt a patch of woodland and a field in stubble, on a sudden, from among the trees, cloaked in a measure by the mist, there sprang upon us a troop of corseleted horsemen. They had, I doubted not, got wind of my approach, and lain in wait under covert of the wood to cut me off.

Some of our fine gentlemen that showed their bravery at court were wont to boast that one Englishman was a match for five Spaniards; but such vainglorious brag is bemoaned by those who, as I myself, have encountered those doughty warriors in the field. The Spaniard may be a paltry adversary on the seas, though even there I have met with some that were no mean fellows. Howbeit on land I found them valorous and redoubtable foemen, whom to despise would argue a pitiful ignorance and marvellous ill reckoning.

I had with me six or seven stout fellows, good swordsmen and well seasoned to war; but our enemy numbered a full score, who smote upon us like thunder and bore us down by sheer weight and fury. In my time I have been in many a sore strait and hazard, but never stood I in such jeopardy as when two of my men were cast headlong from their saddles and the Spaniards held the rest of us like rats in a trap. We had not time to wheel about and trust to the speed of our horses; the utmost that we could do was to back among the trees and play the man. There was a mighty clashing of steel upon armour as we gave stroke for stroke; but the enemy beset us vehemently, and had well-nigh encompassed us without hope of life, when, in the twinkling of an eye, there leapt from the depths of the wood a half-score of wild and unkempt figures, that flung themselves with exceeding heat and fury into the thick of the mellay, making marvellous quick play with their short knives, both upon the horses and the bodies of the Spaniards, at the joints of their harness.

This timely interposition put new heart into my stout fellows, who plied their swords with such manful resolution as made the Spaniards, already confused and baffled by the waspish newcomers, take thought for their safety and seek to draw out of danger. In short, within two minutes such of them as had not fallen betook themselves to flight, spurring their steeds every man in a contrary direction. My men in the fervency of victory made to pursue them; whereupon, being in no mind to be enticed further within the enemy's lines, I halloed to them loudly to refrain. They reined up and cantered back to me, save one headstrong and reckless fellow, John Temple by name, who pressed hard on the heels of the rearmost Spaniard, and was soon lost to sight beyond the confines of the wood.

Very well content with this happy issue from our troubles, I turned about to see more clearly what manner of men were those that had wrought our deliverance. Their aspect and garb bespoke them as boors of the country, for they wore rough smocks, round fur bonnets, and breeches of wondrous largeness and of a blue colour; yet they had not on their feet the wooden clogs of use and wont, but went barefoot for swiftness. I was minded to offer them some recompense for their service, and being as yet too new in the country to have gained anything of their speech, I bade one of my men, who had been long among Netherlandish folk, acquaint them with my purpose. Whereupon a young man who had hitherto held himself backward and aloof, stepped forth, and addressing me in execrable French, said—

”Sir, we covet no reward, having done that which we have done in the service of our country, and for behoof of those that serve her also.”

Taking more particular note of this young man, I perceived that neither in favour nor in speech did he match the others of his company.

”Sir,” said I, ”we are beholden to you. I would fain know your name.”

With some hesitancy he replied—

”Sir, call me Van der Kloof; ’twill serve as well as another.”

I gave him a hard look, to ensure that I might know him again; but having made it a rule of conduct never to pry or meddle with matters that do not concern me, I forbore further question. Whereupon the young man told me of his own accord how that he had lain in the wood for a good while, keeping watch on the Spaniards, our late adversaries, who had come from the direction of Bergen, and were going, as he thought, towards the camp of Verdugo, the Spanish governor. I got from him sundry informations concerning matters in Bergen, though not so much as I should have liked.

The hour was now growing late, and John Temple had not yet returned. I had thought that, when he found himself without support from us, he would ride back without delay, and his continued absence made me fear for his safety. Though by his stupidity or obstinacy he deserved no better than to fall into the hands of the Spaniards, I was loth to lose any man of my charge; accordingly, we rode warily some short distance after him. But when we found him not, we turned about and made towards our own camp, only desiring Van der Kloof, if he should meet with Temple, to bid him follow hard after us.

We were within a bowshot of our camp when Temple overtook us. His horse was in a great heat and foam, and the man himself was in a sorry case, having a great gash in his cheek, his morion gone, his doublet slashed and bedabbled with blood.

”How now, sirrah!” I cried to him as he rode among us. ”Art deaf, that thou didst not hear my command, or a mere addle-pate, to go alone into the midst of a

host?" And I rated him very roundly, I do assure you. The man said not a whit in his proper defence, but pled that being at the very heels of a Spaniard who had dealt hardly with him in the fight, he could not endure to leave him without giving him a Roland for his Oliver. The chase was longer than his expectation; and the Spaniard, seeing him persistent, on a sudden wheeled about and met him face to face. They two fought it out, and after a long and laboursome bout, whereof Temple bore many eloquent and grievous tokens, he overcame his adversary and made his quietus.

And then he displayed before me the spoils of this engagement, to wit, a fine Toledo blade; a belt of good Cordovan leather, the pouch filled with Spanish dollars; and a jewelled ring of gold. And when I had told him that he might keep these for himself, he brought forth from under his belt a strip of paper, and put it into my hand.

"This I espied, sir," he said, "through a rent in the don's doublet, and seeing there was writing thereupon, being no scholar myself, I fished it out for your worship's perusal."

Thinking 'twas some love billet that the hapless Spaniard had worn against his heart, I was in a manner loth to take it. But I bethought myself directly after that in time of war it behoves a man to suspect all and trust none, and in this mind I spread open the paper and bent my eyes upon it. And then I was not a little discontented at the meagreness of what I read. 'Twas nothing but a table of stores, writ in the Spanish tongue: so many tubs of powder, so many chests of the same, so many spare pikes, so many double bullets for the calivers, so many bullets for the matchlocks, so many round shot for the sakers and culverins—in truth, I did not read every article, being persuaded that the fellow from whom the paper was taken was some pitiful storekeeper, a man of no account. Yet I stowed it within my doublet, from a mere habit of prudence, and rode on, telling the man Temple jestingly that my share of the booty was paltry by comparison with his.

II

It was dark when I came to my lodging, and learnt from my servant that Sir Francis Vere, some while before, had sent to seek me. I made haste to attend the general, whom I found alone at his supper.

"Ha, Rudd," he cried to me in his great voice, "I am glad to see thee, lad." (He was but ten years my elder, but let that pass.) "How hast fared?"

I rehearsed very shortly the particulars of my excursion, and those few matters I had learnt of the Dutchman; but held my peace as touching the paper Temple had given me, deeming that to be of no moment. Sir Francis made me compliments on my good hap in coming off with a whole skin, and then, bidding me share his meal, pushed a letter over the table towards me.

"Read that," said he, "and tell me your mind upon it."

The letter, I found, was from Prince Maurice himself, concerning Bergen, the place from before which I had even now returned. The Prince was troubled in mind about its safety. It had been some two months besieged by the Spaniards, and he was as yet unable to stir towards its relief, being himself menaced by a greater force, the which he believed to be looking for some movement on his part thitherward, with the intent to fall upon him as he marched. The city had hitherto made a good defence, but there had come to his ears rumours of a weak-kneed party in the council, and he feared lest, as the labour and hardship of the defence waxed greater, the tottering loyalty of these burghers should fail utterly, and they deliver up their city into the enemy's hands. In this strait he besought the aid of Sir Francis, requesting him to use all endeavours to save the place, chiefly by strengthening the hands of those burghers among the council that were still trusty and faithful.

"A murrain on him!" cried Sir Francis, as I set the letter down. "Why does he sit still, this Prince Do-Nothing? Did he strike a blow I would give him a mighty backing, but 'tis not in me to play the nurse, and cosset faint-hearts. He must seek another man for that job, one of his own slow Dutchmen, pardy!"

But it flashed upon me in a moment that the Prince had shown wisdom and discretion in seeking an Englishman for this part. I had learnt already that there was great jealousy between the several cities; each was in a manner a little republic; and the burghers of one city would be apt to look with ill-favour upon any man from another who should offer to teach them their duty. The like resentment would not be stirred up by an Englishman, more especially if he were commended to them as one expert in war and cunning in counsel. In this I thought Prince Maurice had done wisely, and so I told Sir Francis. He looked at me very sharply, fingering his beard, and then smote upon the table and cried with a great laugh:

"By the Lord Harry, thou art the man!"

I stared at him, at the first not understanding his intent. He laughed again, and said:

"Who so fit for this business as Master Christopher Rudd, expert in war, as witness his exploits with Henry of Navarre; cunning in counsel, as witness his lecture and admonition at this very table! You shall go into Bergen; you shall take in hand the instruction of the burghers; you shall strengthen the weak hands and

confirm the feeble knees; a Daniel come to judgment!"

I did not relish his mockery, nor in any wise covet the office he would thrust upon me. But his laughter stung me to a great heat (though I showed it not), and, not counting the cost as an older man had done, I determined in my mind that I would do this thing, come of it what might. Whereupon, feigning to take him in merry mood, I smote upon the table likewise, declared 'twas a right royal jest, and vowed that on the morrow I would make my way privily through the enemy's lines into Bergen, and instal myself tutor among the mynheers. Sir Francis applauded me, still in sport, not supposing that I had spoken soberly and in earnest.

When I came to reflect upon it in my own chamber I questioned whether I were not clean witless, for the task I had taken upon myself was fitter for a man well acquainted with these burghers than for a man raw and untried. Nevertheless, having put the halter about my own neck, I could blame none but myself if I was hanged withal, and from sheer pride of soul I was steadfast to my purpose.

Accordingly, the next day, without any more speech of Sir Francis, I went about quietly to get myself a trusty Dutchman who should guide me into Bergen. By good fortune I lighted upon a man that not only knew English, but had himself gone in and out of the city by a secret way, in despite of the Spaniards. In the dusk we set forth from the camp, with my servant, and rode to a lonely mill some few miles from Bergen, half ruined and burnt in a foray the year before. There we left our horses, which the Dutchman engaged to lead back to the camp, and went down to the river hard by, where, in a clump of rushes, we found his raft cunningly concealed.

It being now dark, we got upon the raft, and oared ourselves warily and in silence down the stream, until we came to a spit or nose of land that was at this season partly submerged and in winter-time wholly. Here we stepped ashore, being within a short bowshot of the Spaniards' trenches. At this hour of the night none but the sentinels were stirring, and, as my guide well knew, the guard hereabout was negligent and unwary.

We crept softly as foxes toward the wall, and as we crawled up the glacis a voice challenged us, and I heard the click of a firelock. My guide made answer in a whisper, and immediately after two rope ladders were let down from the wall, upon which we nimbly mounted to the parapet. There we were confronted by a posse of the burgher guard, armed at all points, and my Dutchman presented me to their captain, saying, according to my instruction, that I was come on business of great moment from Prince Maurice.

The Captain would have led me instantly to the presence of the Burgomaster, but on my assuring him that my errand was not so urgent as that I should disturb that worthy gentleman's rest so unseasonably, he offered to find me a

[image]

WE CREPT SOFTLY AS FOXES TOWARD THE WALL

comfortable lodging for the night. We went together, my servant following, through the dark and silent streets, the Captain telling me that I should lodge in the house of the widow of the late Burgomaster, who had been slain in a skirmish the year before. When I said that I was loth to intrude upon the lady at so late an hour, the Captain declared that Meffrouw Verhoeff would deem it in no wise an intrusion; indeed, he said that I should find a table ready laid, my hostess having a son among the guard for whom she watched on all those nights when he was abroad.

Within a little I found myself at the entrance of a house wherein a lamp shone. At the Captain's knock the door was opened, and a voice asked, "Is it you, Jan?" the speaker not perceiving at the first who we were. The Captain presenting me as an envoy from Prince Maurice, and an Englishman, a soft hand caught mine, and drew me into the house, and I made my salutation to a little old lady, very comely and personable, with a widow's cap and snow-white ruff, who greeted me in English and bade me very heartily welcome. She would hear no excuses upon the lateness of the hour; but led me into her parlour, then left me while she bestowed my servant, and returning, entreated me to do honour to the viands with which her table was sparely spread.

Mistress Verhoeff entertained me as I ate with many particulars of the siege. I was not long of discovering that her small body was the seat of a very fiery and unquenchable spirit; and in truth, while she spoke of the brave deeds done in defence of the city, her cheeks glowed and her eyes sparkled so that she seemed young again. There had been much suffering, she told me; but her folk had learnt to suffer, and of a surety could endure even more grievous afflictions than had yet befallen them.

At these words methought there was trouble in her voice, and I wondered whether she was aware of the rumours whereof Prince Maurice had made mention in his letter to Sir Francis Vere.

She spoke of her dead husband, and of her living son, who was this night on guard at the wall.

"Had his father but lived," she said, "my boy had beyond question held great place, in the field or the council chamber; but now, alack! he trails a pike among the common men."

While we were yet conversing, there was a step without, and a young man

entered to us. He stood amazed to behold a stranger with his mother, but upon her making me known to him, he gave me a courteous salutation and sat himself at the board. Now I never lose the remembrance of a face once seen, and at the first glance I could have avouched that this young man was the same that did me service two days before. Yet the form of his countenance was something changed, and his apparel was wholly bettered, and when he made not the least sign that he knew me, I was tempted to doubt my memory had for once cozened me. We spoke of indifferent matters, and then, with the intent to put him to the test, I said bluntly—

”Sir, have you knowledge or acquaintance of one Mynheer Van der Kloof?”

”I know no man living of that name,” he answered me.

”I crave your pardon, sir,” said I, ”but truly I would fain meet that same mynheer again, that I might renew my thanks for a timely service he rendered me.”

”What was that, sir?” the lady asked; and her son seemed to wait upon my words with mere curiosity.

I related my adventure of two days before, and my hostess averred that Mynheer Van der Kloof was no man of Bergen, seeing that neither was there any family of that name in the city, nor could any force of burghers have been without the walls, the place having been straitly invested for two months past. This in my secret thought I took leave to doubt, but I could not in courtesy urge my opinion, and we left speaking of the matter. Shortly thereafter the lady herself conducted me to my chamber, where I was soon comfortably established between the sheets, as white and fragrant as ever I slept in.

III

On the morrow, very early, I was waited upon by a sergeant come express to conduct me to the Burgomaster, whom the Captain of the Guard had informed of my arrival. I must acknowledge that in the cold and sober light of morning I felt myself to be in something of a pickle. I had announced myself as an emissary from Prince Maurice, but I had no letter of commendation in his hand, nor, in truth, had I so much as set eyes on him. Furthermore, I was a stranger to all in the city, and being little more than a boy,—my years were twenty-two, though, like Portia in Will Shakespeare’s play, I was elder than my looks—being little more than a boy, I say, I doubted of the reception I should meet with among the grave and solemn burghers of the city council. I could but trust to a bold front

and mother wit to carry me through my enterprise, and I took some comfort from the reflection that Hollanders were said to be somewhat dull and heavy. Accordingly, having trimmed myself with exceeding care, and donned the fresh and sumptuous apparel, meet for an ambassador, which my servant had brought, I set forth with assured mien and measured gait, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left upon the gaping onlookers that had gathered in the streets.

Being ushered with much solemnity by the sergeant into the council-chamber, I found myself in presence of a round dozen burghers clad in brave attire, and seated at their table in order of precedency, as I judged. I cast a swift look round as I gave them salutation, at the first taking particular note of none but the Burgomaster at the head of the table, whose aspect tickled me with secret merriment. He was a round pury little man, clean shaven, with double chins resting on his chain of office, and moist and vagrant eyes that did not meet my gaze steadily. I judged him to be pompous and self-conceited, withal of little stability of mind, and, as we say in our homely way, fussy. With hem and haw he addressed me in French, his voice being thick, and speaking as there were a pebble in his mouth.

"Sir, you come from the illustrious Prince Maurice of Nassau?" he said.

[image]

*"SIR, YOU COME FROM THE ILLUSTRIOUS PRINCE MAURICE
OF NASSAU?"*

For answer I bowed.

"You bring a letter under his hand and seal?" he proceeded.

I hold that to speak truth is ever the best course; wherefore, attuning my voice to a confident serenity, I replied—

"Sir, I bear no letter, but I will in a few words explain to the worshipful council my presence in your city. His illustrious Highness, tendering your welfare, and moved by your stout and manful resistance to the Spaniard, hath writ to my General, Sir Francis Vere, requiring him to send to you one of his captains, both as a witness of his Highness' satisfaction, and with the intent to lend you aid and support. The choice fell upon me, Christopher Rudd, unworthy though I be, by reason of some slight knowledge in warfare gained in the service of His Majesty of France. Such small skill as I am master of, therefore, is yours to dispose of, albeit the measures you have taken up to this present are so aptly conceived and so doughtily executed that I deem my part to be that of admirer rather than counsellor."

This pretty speech appeared to give the burghers some satisfaction, but I perceived that the Burgomaster's right-hand neighbour, a lank beetle-browed fellow of swarthy hue and Castilian cast of feature, shot me a keen and questioning glance out of his narrow eyes. "This fellow is worth the watching," I thought; but I let not my eyes dwell upon him beyond the moment.

After some further debate I was made partaker in their deliberations. From one and another I gathered information about the course of the siege and the measures of defence they had concerted, and I was not long of discovering, by hint and suggestion, the rift that Prince Maurice had suspected. The most part of the council were true men, bold and stout of heart; but there were two or three that let fall doubts and wagged their heads, with sighs and doleful looks. And I began to perceive a certain method in this despondency, more especially on the part of the lank man aforesaid, for which reason I found myself intently observing all that he spake. He was most bitter and vehement in denouncing the Spaniards, and prated very big about withstanding them to the last breath; yet these heroical counsels of his were ever accompanied with a croak and quaver, as that famine was a fouler enemy than the sword, and that all those that escaped from the one or the other would surely be hanged by the Spaniards. By this means, I perceived, he at once cunningly magnified his own steadfastness and resolution, and instilled dire apprehension and dismal foreboding into the minds of his weaker brethren.

While I thus noted the strange policy of this man, I took a certain amusement from the mien and conduct of the worthy Burgomaster. Now he was at the top of resolution, now in the depth of black despair; now breathing out fire and fury, now lamenting the scant provision of victuals and munitions, and questioning whether any man's life was worth a doit. The change from one mood to the other was so sudden, as the deliberations of the council swayed this way and that under the dexterous handling of the lank man, that I set the Burgomaster down as a weakling, a reed shaken in the wind, and made some question in my mind whether the destinies of the town were safe under his governance.

Upon the breaking up of the council, I was conducted by the Burgomaster and the Captain of the Guard around the defences of the city, being accompanied also by the lean and black-browed councillor of whom I have spoken. When I had taken note of all, it was dinner time, and the Burgomaster bid me make that meal with him in his own house. This I was very willing to do, since I found the little man a continual entertainment. The lank fellow and the Captain of the Guard were my table-mates, and we fared as handsomely as you could expect in a beleaguered city. In truth, it was not a sumptuous repast; but the meagreness of the fare was in some sort countervailed by the bewitching presence of the Burgomaster's daughter. Remember, I was but young; a bright eye and a rosy

cheek, when matched with a gracious mien and a sweet and tuneable voice, cast a spell upon me; and the fair beauty of Mistress Jacqueline had made amends for meaner fare, even for dry bread and indifferent water.

I perceived that the Burgomaster's lanky friend bent an amorous eye upon the damsel, spoke her fair and softly, and sought every way to render himself pleasing in her sight; and that the Burgomaster watched this underplay with great contentment. But I perceived also—and I own it gave me a joy quite beyond reason—that Mistress Jacqueline received these attentions with a serene indifference, which I told myself would have been a positive coldness and scorn but for dread of her father's displeasure.

We walked away together, the Captain of the Guard and I, and as we went I informed myself discreetly on sundry matters whereon I had some curiosity. The lean lank rascal—so I called him already—was named Mynheer Cosmo Volmar, a Spaniard on his mother's side, president of the gild of locksmiths in the city, and keeper of the stores. He was known to be paying his court to Mistress Jacqueline, and had her father's good will. The lady had, however, been betrothed aforetime to Jan Verhoeff, son of the late Burgomaster and of the widow lady, my hostess, and the match had been broken off by her father when it was discovered, on the death of Mynheer Verhoeff, that he had left but a paltry heritage. Of all the burgher families in Bargaen, the Verhoeffs had suffered the most grievous loss during the war; yet the exceeding smallness of the late Burgomaster's estate was a cause of wonderment in the city. The young lovers bore their parting very hardly; and though Mynheer Volmar's suit was approved and furthered by her father Mynheer Warmond, the present Burgomaster, Mistress Jacqueline had as yet looked upon it but frostily.

These particulars were pleasing to me, for I saw that I had come into a coil wherein affairs of state and domestic matters were close interwoven. I was never so well pleased as when I had a tangle to unravel; and the enterprise I had taken upon myself in merry sport bade fair to give me unlooked-for entertainment.

IV

On the afternoon of that day, the Spaniards made a very hot assault at a breach in the wall hard by the north gate of the city. From the commencement of the siege this had been the chief mark of their ordnance, the which had cast upon it as many as a thousand shot a day. But the burghers had diligently repaired by night the mischief wrought in daytime, so that the damage was but small; and the

assaults which the besiegers had already made upon the breach had been repelled with no great difficulty.

Nevertheless, on this day the attack was exceeding fierce. The Spaniards swarmed into the breach, and endeavoured mightily at push of pike to bear down our defences. Our burghers met them with heroical courage, and quit themselves well in the close fighting upon the wall. I was not sorry that the assault had been delivered so soon after my entrance into the city, for I had thereby occasion to win the good favour of the burghers by lending them aid, thereby getting me a shrewd knock or two. There was no question of generalship or high strategy; it was sheer journeyman fighting. In this I observed that the Captain of the Guard played a right valiant part, and I saw with a good deal of satisfaction that young Jan Verhoeff pressed ever into the thickest of the fray, and plied his pike with commendable spirit. The tide of battle carried me more than once to his side, and I marked his face alit with the joy of the true warrior. We beat back the invaders, though not without losing many of our ripest pikemen and calivermen, a heavy toll upon our success.

It had not escaped my observation that the city fathers were scarce so forward at this critical moment as loyalty and good example required. I saw neither the Burgomaster nor Mynheer Volmar, but I learnt that certain of the council had posted themselves very valiantly at such parts of the defences as were not at that time threatened. As I returned with Jan Verhoeff to his mother's house I overheard two burghers speaking together of this witness to their rulers' valiancy, and Jan shot a look at me that seemed to question whether I nourished doubts of the worthy fathers. I said nothing on that head, but spoke of the tough work we had been through, the which I hoped would discourage the enemy from attempting another assault for some time. I said too that since he must be very weary, he would be loth to serve among the night watch, whereupon he told me that he was free for that night, his turn of duty coming upon every second day.

I mention this because, in the middle of the night, as I lay cogitating a scheme I purposed to put next day before the Captain of the Guard, I heard the young man, whose room was beside mine, descend the stairs and go forth of the house. This circumstance caused me to wonder somewhat what his errand might be, for after the fatigue of the day it must be a thing of moment that could draw him from his bed. But being deeply concerned with matters of my own, I gave over thinking of him, and only remembered his going forth when I saw him pale and hard of eye at our breakfast in the morning. The good lady his mother asked if he had not slept well. "Passably," he answered, and said no more, whereby I knew that, whatsoever his errand had been, it was to be kept secret from his mother.

I lost no time in seeking out the Captain of the Guard, to acquaint him with

the fruit of my cogitations in the night. He had already confessed to me that he had but small training in the arts of war; wherefore, being already assured of his fidelity and of his doughtiness in fight, I had no squeamishness in offering him my counsel, which a more tried warrior might have taken amiss.

I first pointed out to him certain weak places in the defences of the city; to wit, the neighbourhood of a mill, where the city wall had not been strengthened because of some fancied assurance that the mill race was protection enough; and also the rampart by the church, where a thick clump of trees without the wall offered good cover to the enemy resolutely assaulting. The Captain was very quick to see these deficiencies when I had mentioned them, and perfectly ready to make them good.

From this I proceeded to a further matter.

"Sir," I said to him, "your men did right nobly yesterday; yet methinks we should not be content merely with having beat back the Spaniards. To endue them with a true respect for us, and our men with a true respect for themselves, it needs to repay them in their own coin: I mean, to sally out and fall upon them unawares, at some convenient spot of their camp."

He turned upon me a troubled countenance, and said—

"Sir, I doubt not of the soundness of your reasoning, nor of the good that would spring from a successful sally; but I question if we should prosper. My men are stout of heart, and behind their walls fight with sturdy resolution; but they are not bred to war, being in the main simple burghers that have taken up arms by mere necessity: and beyond the walls I fear lest their skill should not match with their courage."

Whereupon I set myself with patience to overcome his diffidence, confirming my arguments with instances from the wars of King Henry of Navarre. Having brought him to my mind, we repaired together to the council chamber, where the council met every morning, and I laid my scheme before the assembled fathers, employing a rhetorical manner of exposition for which I was beholden to my study of Cicero his orations. The little Burgomaster took fire from my rhetoric, and, to my secret amusement, began to deliver himself of sundry fine sentiments in tune. He swore that, were he captain, he would do this and that, force a footing here and seize a place of vantage there, and smite those Amalekites (so he termed the Spaniards), even as Joshua, the son of Nun.

This was my opportunity. While his face was still red with warlike ardour, and the fumes of his valiance filled the air, I addressed him in words wherein I sought to infuse deference mingled with admiration.

"Worshipful sir," said I, "happy is the city whose head is of so valorous and undauntable a spirit. With joy I hail you as leader of our foray, whom to follow will make me proud, as I doubt not it will make also the Captain of the Guard

and every man of this devoted garrison.”

At this the Burgomaster bridled and looked round upon the councillors with an assured and dauntless mien. The eyes of the Captain of the Guard twinkled, but for me alone; and on the dark countenance of Mynheer Volmar I observed a sneer.

My plan was devised, in fact, to procure, if we could, a quantity of food from the Spaniards’ camp, such as, in our present dearth, would be exceeding acceptable. I advised that our attack should be made at dusk, when the enemy were cooking their evening meal, and upon that part of their camp where the cooking was chiefly done, if we might judge by the number of the fires in that quarter. It was also, as I had perceived, the quarter least amply defended, and most easily assailable from our side. By my scheme, a strong muster of the burghers should engage the attention of the Spaniards on the ramparts near the church, while an elect body of two hundred and fifty, with a support of equal number, should sally forth at the mill, fall swiftly upon the camp, lay hands on all that we could, and retire into the city under cover of the support.

I will not try your patience with relating in gross the history of this enterprise or of the many others, small and great, wherein I had a part while I sojourned in Bergen. I mention it for no other reason than because it was the first of those that I devised, of which some came to less happy issues, when the Spaniards grew more wary. In truth, my remembrance of the most of these is but dim, and this the first would hardly be so clear in my mind were it not close inmeshed with the behaviour of Mynheer Warmond the Burgomaster, who from that time established for himself a name for valour which his less courageous doings thereafter could not wholly dim.

For all his brave words at the council, when it came to the point the little man set forth sundry doubts in respect of his fitness to lead our sally. Being a man of full habit, and one that went heavily upon his pins, he feared lest his tardiness of gait should put a check upon us more nimble footers. Whereto I answered that, stayed up and furthered by two sturdy burghers of proved celerity, one on either side, and fired with his own lusty spirit, he would out of question not lag a yard length behind the nimblest of us. Whereupon he confessed that he was never equal to himself in the dark, and my answer was that he had but to keep his eyes steadfastly fixed on the lights in the Spaniards’ camp before him. In short, to every objection of this nature I had my answer ready, nor would I allow that we could have any assurance of success unless he were our leader.

’Twas falling dusk, and mirky, when, all things being ready, we issued forth of the gate in utter silence, the Burgomaster toddling with scant breath at my side. We made such haste as that we were nigh upon the Spanish trenches ere we were discovered. Having swiftly dispatched the few sentinels that held watch

at this quarter, we sped over the trench and ran, as though 'twas a race for a prize, across the space of open ground that sundered it from the camp. Here there were but few of the enemy afoot, and they busied for the most part with cooking, the main of the force being gathered in front of the gate by the church, where the burghers had been mustered with blare of trumpet and tuck of drum to deceive them. These busy cooks, as soon as they espied us, took incontinently to their heels, sending up a great cry and clamour for help; whereupon some companies of the enemy, which had been standing to arms at no greater distance than two or three furlongs, came towards us at full stretch of legs, kindling their matches as they ran. I posted fourscore of our party to deal with them, while the rest of us made diligent perquisition in the enemy's pantry. Thus we gained time enough to seize as much victual as we could carry, which done, at a blast of my whistle we turned our backs upon the camp and made all convenient speed towards our own walls.

Being cumbered with divers big and unwieldy burdens, even with making the utmost expedition we were not able to compass our safety before the vanward of the enemy burst upon us. With the fourscore men aforesaid, some pikemen, some arquebusiers, I held our rearward, having by me the worshipful Burgomaster, whom indeed I had been at pains to hold within reach. At our first coming to the camp, when the cookmen fled, the little Burgomaster was like to split with his heroical valiance and untameable fury. Crying havoc upon the Castilian dogs he brandished his tuck with no small peril to his own party. But when it came to plundering, his warlike ardour was assuaged in admiration of the flesh-pots. He caught up a long chain of bag-puddings, such as had not been seen in Bargaen for many a day, and cast it in a merry sport about his neck, as it were insignia of his office. Then, still holding his tuck bare with his right hand, he seized with his left a monstrous hog's ham, and so laden was ready to decamp with his booty.

The Spaniards hotly pursuing us, I perceived that the Burgomaster's valour was now all melted away, and that he was beset by a shaking fear and trepidation. The ground over which we ran was exceeding rugged, and the little round man puffed and gurgled as he tripped upon hindrances, striving to keep pace with our covering party, but perilously encumbered by the dangling puddings and the massy ham. Beholding his plight, one of the burghers in mere kindness, or peradventure out of a licorous appetite, sought to aid him by relieving him of this part of his load; but the Burgomaster clung to it the more closely, protesting vehemently that he would not be robbed, and beseeching us to succour and sustain him.

Running thus in the twilight, he struck his foot upon a tussock of grass, and fell headlong, and lay groaning and shrieking for help, unable to rise by reason of his hands being engaged, the one with his sword, the other with the ham;

for even in this extremity he clave manfully to his weapon, and covetously to his provender. I stayed my steps to lift him up, and by this delay saw myself overtaken by four or five of the Spaniards, who came about to overwhelm us. Summoning to me two of our pikemen that were happily within call, I faced about with them to beat off this attack upon our rear, knowing well that if we could not scatter them we must needs fly immediately for our lives, since we could hear the shouts of a numerous body hastening towards us from the camp.

At this pass did the Burgomaster achieve high and imperishable renown. The foremost of the Spaniards, charging full upon us, thrust out his sword towards the breast of Mynheer Warmond, and had surely then let out his life but that by good hap I interposed my own blade, and struck the Spaniard's weapon from his hand. But the fury of his onset threw him clean upon the Burgomaster, who, letting his sword fall, but cleaving valorously to the ham, flung his arms about the Spaniard's neck and brought him heavily to the ground. Behold then a spectacle whereat the gods might laugh; upon the ground a marvellous medley of legs, arms, bag-puddings and ham, out of which issued a most admirable discordance of Spanish and Low Dutch.

Being joined at this time by others of our party, we were able to hold the pursuers at bay while I sought to disentangle the Burgomaster from his adversary. This was no light achievement, for the little man, clasping his foe in strength of malice and with the tight embrace of one drowning, yet never loosing the ham, could scarce be persuaded that he was not in the article of death. Being at length put asunder, they were both got upon their feet, and we hurried them at a good round pace towards the wall. Here our supporting party was drawn up, the which directed a volley of bullets over our heads at the pursuers; and these being further discomfited by the shot from sundry culverins parked within the ramparts, the pursuit was checked, and we got safe within the city, having lost but two or three.

Right merry were the citizens at the success of our enterprise. Some ran to the church tower and set the bells a-ringing; others fired off cannon until the Captain of the Guard peremptorily forbade that wastage of powder. Our plunder was carried to the market square, and given in charge of an officer appointed to dispense it for the benefit of all. From this ordinance the Burgomaster's ham and bag-puddings were exempt, they being considered meet and convenient rewards of his prowess; moreover, he straitly refused to give them up, and marched through the street in a glow of triumph, bearing proudly his spoils.

The Spaniard who had fallen victim to Mynheer Warmond's puddings and ham was proved to be a captain of some note; and none having seen the manner of his capture save myself, who held my peace thereupon, the Burgomaster won great praise for that he had taken with his own hand, on the field of battle, one of the enemy's captains. He showed himself a very glutton for applause, and I

[image]

*RIGHT MERRY WERE THE CITIZENS AT THE SUCCESS OF OUR
ENTERPRISE*

was careful to feed his appetite to the full, because I saw that, having this large conceit of himself, and a reputation to maintain, he was the less likely to become subject to the timorous and faint-hearted members of the council. A hero in his own despite, he vexed me often with his thrasonical airs and vainglorious trumpeting of his own virtue; but I bore with him, believing that in so doing I should best serve my cause.

V

For some while I have said nothing of Mynheer Volmar, not because he holds any lesser place in this history, but because he had no part in the enterprise that I have just recounted, the which nevertheless concerned him dearly, as you shall see.

Mynheer Volmar had spoken of our enterprise as a hair-brained adventure, the device of a very madman, and a mere courting of disaster. A prophet, whether of good or ill, likes not that his predictions should belie and mock him; and Volmar, when his prophecies fell out so wide of the mark, looked upon me, the begetter of the design, ever more sourly than he was wont. And when the Burgomaster at our next council leant rather upon my opinion than upon the opinion of his familiar, I perceived by some sixth sense, as it were, that Volmar entertained a violent ill-will against me, albeit he was at great pains to cloak his hatred under a guise of careless indifference.

For this reason I deemed it fitting to improve my knowledge of that councillor. I learnt from my friend, the Captain of the Guard, that Volmar was well-reputed in the city, having much goods laid up, and yet being open-handed. He was charged with keeping the stores of munition and with the defence of a certain portion of the walls, and was very diligent in these offices. It was his custom, every Sunday forenoon about nine of the clock, that day and hour having been commended to him by one well skilled in astrology, to fire off a culverin upon the Spaniards from the parapet of his own ward. The Captain of the Guard, upon

my asking what purpose might be served by this quaint device, assured me with great gravity that, a shot being fired at a moment shown as propitious by the conjunction of the planets, the Spaniards would never stir that day, and the burghers might pay their devotions in church without fear of disturbance. I marvelled at so strange a mingling of heathenish superstition with Christian piety, but I forbore to speak my mind upon it, deeming every man entitled to believe as he listeth.

On the night but one following our sally I was returning at a late hour, and alone, from making a round of the defences. When I came near the house of Mistress Verhoeff, where I still made my lodging, I heard the scuffling of a hurried footstep, and espied, though dimly, a man slinking into a narrow alley upon the further side of the street. I saw this, without considering it; and I might have thought of it no more but that I heard my hostess' son stealthily quit the house maybe an hour after. Then putting the one thing with the other, I began to wonder, and cogitate, and question whether there were not something in the wind. It came into my mind that the man I had seen afore had been disturbed at my coming, and slunk away to escape me; and I began to suspect that Jan Verhoeff and he were partners in some secret night work, I knew not what.

I was in my own room, but not yet abed; and, smelling a matter for inquiry, I crept down the stairs, carrying my boots, and these I donned at the door, and then followed the young man up the street. I had taken but a few steps when I was aware that two figures were in front of me, the one dogging the other close like a shadow. They were proceeding towards the walls, to that place where a breach had been made and was now repaired in part. The sky being clear and bright with stars, I held the two men in sight until they came near the breach aforesaid, where the foremost vanished away, and the latter stood fast, at some little distance, as he were keeping watch. So did I likewise. There I stayed some while, until the man, as though weary of waiting, turned about and walked back by the way he had come, and then, with the intent that I might see him more closely, I hid myself behind a jutting mass of masonry which the man must needs pass by.

I was now able to perceive, as he came towards me, that he was lofty of stature, and, passing me within a yard or two, his gait seemed to me to be that of the lanky councillor Mynheer Volmar. This was a whet upon my curiosity, for I weened it strange that this man should be spying upon his vanquished rival, whom in the fallen state of his fortunes he had no cause to fear as pretender to the hand of Mistress Jacqueline.

When he had gone beyond earshot, I took my way to the wall, and there I was immediately challenged by the sentinel. On my giving the word the man recognized me, and made me a decent salutation. I inquired of him whether he had taken note of any strange movement or stirring among the Spaniards, or of

any roaming person on our side of the wall; and he declared that neither on the one side nor the other had he seen aught, nor any person save only the sentinel next to him on the defences. Whereupon I returned to my lodging, not a little perplexed.

On my descending next morning to break my fast with Mistress Verhoeff as my custom was, I found the good dame in sore affliction and distress. It had just been told her that her son was at that time lying a prisoner in the bailey, having been seized in the middle of the night by a posse of halberdiers. It was charged against him, so 'twas reported, that he was a spy for the enemy; for he had been discovered making his way over the wall, and being searched, papers were found upon him that gave colour to this accusation.

This news, following so sudden on what I had seen overnight, set my wits a-jogging, and I began to smell a rat, as we say. But my consideration of the matter was broken in upon by the piteous outcry of my hostess, who with many tears and lamentable entreaties besought me to save her son. She declared that the young man's honesty was beyond impeachment; that it was some monstrous error; that he was a true man, like his father before him; and when I asked what had taken him abroad at so unseasonable an hour, on a night when his duty did not call him to the ramparts, she protested that some enemy must have lured and enticed him forth, of set purpose to undo him. I gave her my honest opinion that the young man was innocent, and engaged to do what I could on his behalf, yet owning that I was at a loss what means I might conveniently take.

After some deliberation I determined that I must first visit the prisoner, and inquire for myself into his case. To this end I repaired to the Burgomaster, by whose allowance alone would the gates of the bailey be opened to me. I was not overmuch astonished when he denied my request, averring that the young man was a villainous rascal, whose guilt was manifest, and whom he would assuredly hang as a warning to all traitors. By this I perceived that the Burgomaster had judged the prisoner aforehand, the reason whereof was his established misliking. In my course through the world I have oft-times observed that a man that has wronged his neighbour will scarce pardon him; and I held that the Burgomaster had done the lad a wrong in crossing his love for no cause save a worldly misfortune that time might cure. I made bold to inform Mynheer Warmond that in my country a man is held to be innocent until he is proved guilty; and then I was not a little incensed when he, shifting his ground, roundly declared that the less I meddled with this matter the better for me. There were already whispers against me, he said, and the having taken up my abode in the widow's house would incline some to suspect that I was privy to the son's iniquity. Indeed, he counselled me to seek a new lodging without delay.

At this I could scarce hold my patience; but reflecting that angry words

could avail me nothing, having also a shrewd notion as to the fountain-head whence this slander and calumny sprang, I swallowed my wrath, and by dint of coaxing and wheedling got from the Burgomaster the authority I sought. So armed, I hastened to the bailey, and being admitted, found the young man herded with as pretty a set of rogues as ever I saw. The warder gave me leave, after the passing of a trifle of money, to speak with the prisoner in a room apart, and thither we betook ourselves.

Now I did not love Mynheer Jan Verhoeff. We had had little communication; in truth, he shunned me, and when we met at table he seldom opened his lips save only to engulf his food, whereby I had come to look upon him as a morose and lubberly fellow. Furthermore, I disliked his goings and comings secretly by night, and his denial of the service he had done me; for I was firmly persuaded that Verhoeff and Van der Kloof were one and the same. Wherefore, when we were closeted in that little room of the bailey, and he opposed a sullen and stubborn silence to my proffer of help, I was ready to wash my hands of his affair and let him hang. But remembering the widow lady his mother, and bethinking me that his ungracious bearing perchance were nothing but the austerity of an honest man wronged, I curbed my impatience and set myself to reason with him.

I showed him how his secret sallies by night, whatsoever their purpose might be, must needs breed suspicion in the minds of those burdened with the defence of the city, and that if his intent were honest, to reveal it could at the least work him no harm. And, hinting that I myself harboured certain suspicions, the which he might aid me to resolve, I at length prevailed upon him to make full confession and disclosure. And this is what he told me.

Being near the Burgomaster's house one evening (for what purpose I forbore to inquire), he had seen Mynheer Volmar issue forth, and, instead of making straight for his own house, stand a while looking heedfully around, and then proceed towards the ramparts, in the furtive manner of one that avoids observation. Bearing him ill-will as his supplanter in the graces of Mistress Jacqueline, and suspecting he knew not what, Verhoeff dogged him circumspectly to the wall, and there beheld him sit upon a culverin and gaze intently towards the trenches of the enemy. A sentinel was pacing up and down, and to him Volmar addressed a few words in a whisper, whereupon he stood fast, and Volmar hastened to the embrasure of the parapet. Immediately thereafter, Verhoeff caught the sound of a low whistle, followed eftsoon by a faint answer, as it were an echo, from below. Then Volmar drew some white thing from his pocket, wound a cord about it, and, as it appeared to Verhoeff, let it down into the moat. In a little there came again a dull and hollow sound, and Volmar withdrew himself and returned into the city, murmuring a word to the sentinel as he passed.

On the morrow Verhoeff took pains to inform himself of the name of the

sentinel at that place, and was not astonished to find that he was of Mynheer Volmar's household. In that time of trouble every man, whatsoever his rank and condition, had his part in the city's defence.

From that day Verhoeff kept diligent watch upon the councillor, and discovered that he hied him stealthily to the ramparts every Wednesday, and in like manner let down what was doubtless a paper, the which was received by a man in the moat beneath, and conveyed by him, swimming, to the further side.

Here was treason, of a surety. Verhoeff debated with himself whether he should broach it to the Captain of the Guard or the Burgomaster; but he bethought him that he had not as yet sufficient proof, and that, moreover, the charge might be set down to the spleen and malice of a beaten rival. Wherefore he determined to hold his peace until he had gotten some clear and manifest proof of the treason he suspected.

One Wednesday night, therefore, he slid into the moat, and swam to the other side, intending to lie in wait for the receiver as he returned with the letter, and wrest it from him. But making wary approach to the spot over against the gun whereon Volmar was wont to sit, he was nonplussed to find three or four Spanish footmen, awaiting their comrade. Verhoeff kept himself close until the swimmer joined them, and then, recking nothing of his peril, followed the party as they stole silently back to their lines. While they jested with the sentinel that challenged them, he crept into the camp, and watched in secret what should befall. The footmen proceeded together a few paces; then all but one turned aside, they bidding him good-night, and he continuing on his way towards a large tent, the which, after a brief parley with some one within, he entered. Verhoeff swiftly stole to the back side of the tent, designing to cut a hole in the wall and spy upon what was done; but a light shone from beneath a flap in the canvas, which raising, he beheld a man in shirt and hose sodden with water, standing before another in a long night-robe, who was reading by the light of a candle a paper which had beyond doubt been brought by the swimmer from the city. Having finished his perusal, this man said—

"Good. Our friend within is diligent. To-morrow you will convey this to the Lord General Verdugo. Take your accustomed party, and have a care, for this paper must not miscarry; I know what a lusty fire-eater you are."

The swimmer laughed and made a salutation, and so departed.

Verhoeff itched to lay hands on that paper, yet durst not follow the man through the camp. But a device came into his mind whereby he might perchance obtain it. He crept and wriggled out of the camp, which was not guarded so needfully as it behoved to be, and when he was beyond the outward trenches he betook himself with all expedition, not to the city, but towards a hamlet where his father had held an estate in the days of his prosperity. There he gathered half

a score of trusty men that would serve him faithfully for his father's sake, and with them took post in a wood which the Spaniard must pass next day when he carried the paper to his general. And 'twas by the happy accident of his lying in wait there that he was able to render me service that day. In despite of the captain's warning, the messenger was tempted by the smallness of my party to attack us, whereby Verhoeff's plan to seize upon the letter was discomfited, for my plight made him show himself sooner than he had intended.

Being foiled, then, and baulked of his purpose by the Spaniards' flight, he was fain to wend his way back to the city, and entered it at dead of night by a secret way known to him. At my appearance on the morrow thereafter he was somewhat discommoded, being desirous that his doings should not be published among the burghers, and yet too high-stomached to entreat my silence. Hence he sought to brazen it out with me, and had since held himself aloof.

From that time he kept a most vigilant watch upon Volmar's doings, by night and day; and it seemed that his patience would be rewarded, for on this last night, having swum the moat, he had found the Spaniard, that was go-between, unattended, and after a fierce struggle had overcome and slain him. Searching among his garments he discovered a leathern pouch, the which, on his slitting it, yielded up a paper. This he bestowed in his pocket, and crossed the moat, but upon climbing the parapet fell clean into the hands of a party of the burgher guard, drawn thither either by the sound of his struggle with the Spaniard, or, as seemed more like, placed there advisedly by Volmar.

While he stood among his captors, protesting and almost persuading them that he was a true man and no traitor, Volmar himself appeared and feigned great astonishment to see him. One of the guard related the cause and manner of the arrest, whereupon the councillor declared roundly that there had been some error, and proposed that the matter should be put to the proof by searching Verhoeff. This being done, the letter was brought to light, the which Volmar then tore open and read by the aid of a dark lantern. He put on a grave and sorrowful look, and gave the letter into the hand of the officer of the guard, and he likewise read it, and immediately cried out that Verhoeff was proved a villainous traitor. Upon this Verhoeff in a fury declared that he had wrested the letter from a Spaniard who had brought it from the city, and from Volmar himself, a saying that provoked a burst of scornful laughter from the officer of the guard and a look of pity from the councillor. The officer commanded that he should be instantly conveyed to the bailey and placed under a strong guard, and Volmar bestowed the letter in his doublet, avouching that he would lay it before the Burgomaster and council on the morrow.

This was the story in brief as Verhoeff told it to me, and I made no doubt he spoke the truth. But I saw that in youthful heat and imprudence he had com-

[image]

VOLMAR READ THE LETTER BY THE AID OF A LANTERN

mitted a grievous error in launching an accusation against the councillor, more especially because he was wholly ignorant of what the letter contained; he had not read it, nor had it been read aloud. Moreover, the secrecy and stealth of his own deeds, the quitting of the city without leave asked, gave strength to the suspicion and mistrust of the officer of the guard. Yet I confessed that in my heart of hearts I did not doubt Volmar was a villain and had entrapped Verhoeff for his own ends; but how to bring his villainy home to him, when he held all the cards, as we say, it outdid my wit to determine.

Nevertheless I engaged myself to do all that in me lay on behalf of the young man, and bidding him be of good cheer I betook myself to the council chamber, where the matter would without doubt be deliberated upon.

VI

The burghers were in full session when I entered the chamber, and I perceived that thunder was in the air. At my entrance they cast very lowering looks upon me; there was some whispering among them, and the Burgomaster shot me a crooked glance, and seemed to return a mute answer to something that Volmar, his neighbour of the right hand, had just said. Feigning blindness to these signs and tokens of trouble, I moved with easy gait to my place at the table, cast my hat upon it, and inquired of the Burgomaster what was the news of the day.

"Sir, sir," said the little man, his pendent chin shaking like the wattle of a turkey-cock, "this levity ill beseems you. You are aware that we have a traitor in our midst, a viper warmed in our bosom; you have even now come from speech with him. I pray the villain has confessed his sins."

"Why no, Mynheer," I said smoothly, "the villain is impenitent, and professes that he has done nought save in love and loyalty to the city. Surely the good repute of his family might dispose you, sirs, to hesitate before you condemn him unheard."

"His family, his family!" stuttered the Burgomaster, whom I perceived to be in his most exalted and arrogant mood. "Hold, sir; peruse this epistle, and say

then whether he be not deserving of the extreme penalty.”

The letter came to me by the hands of the six or seven councillors that sat between me and the Burgomaster, of whom some scowled, some glared, some looked compassionately upon me. I took the paper and cast an eye upon it, and immediately I understood that Jan Verhoeff was in even worse case than I had supposed. ’Twas a very brief epistle, with no superscription nor any signature at the end, written not by any man within the city, but by an enemy without. It warned the nameless receiver that the customary messenger having been slain, by Dutch peasants as ’twas thought, and his dispatch stolen, the last message had not come to the general’s hand; but the writer opined that the city could not endure many days longer, and urged the receiver to employ all his arts upon he knew whom, and furthermore to certify that person that when by his good offices the city should be delivered up, his goods should be spared to him, with a share of the general booty.

”Sir,” said the Burgomaster, when I had read the letter, ”you behold a manifest proof of the traitor’s villainy. He sends word of our hapless state to the enemy; he employs cunning machinations upon some ill-affected person in our city; he is sowing treason in our good field.”

I made bold to say that there was no proof of the letter having been intended for Mynheer Verhoeff, whereupon he bade me look upon the cover, and when I did so I perceived, very faintly inscribed there, the letters J.V.

As I was considering this, suspecting that those letters had been inscribed upon the paper since it was wrested from Verhoeff, Mynheer Volmar spoke. He said that, clear though the testimony seemed to be, he would plead for mercy for the young man. His fortune being so much diminished from that whereto he had been born, he had without doubt been put to a fierce temptation. ”And since,” he proceeded, ”I myself suffer at his hands, inasmuch as he sought to cast suspicion on me, whose whole concern is the welfare of the city, I may most fitly raise my voice in beseeching my brethren to remember the services rendered in time past by the young man’s father, and, mindful of them, to deal mercifully with the son; not to bring him to trial and put him to open shame, but to hold him safe in ward while the city is still compassed about, and then to banish him without scandal to the common weal.”

Perceiving the drift of this, and divining that Volmar had his own good reasons for cloaking the matter, I said with some bluntness that ’twas time to show mercy when guilt was proved. Volmar took me up insolently, declaring that I had no right nor title to speak on such a matter, and that being a stranger, come among them uncommended, and a house-mate with this abandoned traitor, I had best walk warily and manage my tongue, lest I found my own neck in jeopardy.

At this discourse, and the murmurs of approval that broke from certain

of the councillors, I was pricked to indignation, and might have said more than wisdom warranted had not the Burgomaster, plainly ill at ease, interposed himself as peace-maker. I had reason to bless his intervention, because I was thereby hindered from saying in my haste that which I should assuredly have repented at my leisure. For it happened that the Burgomaster calling for the next business, Volmar brought forth the list of stores that it was in his duty to lay before the council every week. This he read out, the councillors harkening with gloomy countenances to the tale of diminished victuals and munitions of war. When he had made an end, the document strayed about the table, and presently came to the hand of the burgher next me, who held it in such manner that I was able to see it clearly. And then within my soul I cried blessings on the Burgomaster, in that he had checked my tongue, for so soon as my eyes fell upon this paper, I knew in a moment that the handwriting was the same as that upon the paper which John Temple had taken from the Spaniard, and which I had, even now, folded in my pocket.

I veiled my eyelids, lest my eyes should betray the joy of my discovery, for this did not rob me wholly of my caution, and I knew that I must first satisfy myself beyond doubt that the writings were the same. This could only be achieved by setting the two papers one against the other for comparison, and I saw not any means of doing this secretly. But within a little, chance gave me the opportunity I sought. The councillor that had the paper set it down upon the table, and joined with the others in talking of the trial to which Jan Verhoeff was to be brought on the morrow. While they were thus engaged I laid my hand upon the paper, and possessed myself of it; then, affecting a perfect indifference to the matter of their discourse, I rose from my place and went to the window, and there, turning my back upon the company, I drew from my pocket the paper John Temple had given me, and set it side by side with the other for just so long as sufficed me to compare them, and prove the writings to be in the selfsame hand. Which done, I took a turn about the chamber, and coming in due time to my place I laid the second paper where it had been before, and soon after departed.

I saw myself now deeply engaged in a matter after my own heart. "'Tis Time's glory," saith Will Shakespeare, "to unmask falsehood and bring truth to light"; and here was I a fellow-worker with Time. I considered within myself what course I should take. I might at once make disclosure of my discovery; but Volmar was so slippery a fellow that I might easily trip unless I had some further evidence of his villainy to lay before the council. Without doubt he would have ready some plausible explanation, the which might recoil upon me, being a stranger and one not held in high esteem. I resolved therefore to bide my time and say nought until I had my evidence all compact—unless indeed Jan Verhoeff were in extremity of peril.

The young man was brought to trial at the time appointed. I was not present in court, deeming it best to hold aloof until I could employ my apparatus to good effect. The only testimony that I myself might have given, touching the charge made against Verhoeff, was that I had seen him steal to the walls by night with Volmar at his heels, and this could not have turned to his favour. The evidence against him was so slight and thin-spun, that in time of peace, and before a just tribunal, it would not have been held sufficient to hang a dog; but his present judges being the magistrates of the city, with the Burgomaster as president, and all men's minds being sore troubled about the city's welfare, the verdict was given against him, and he was sentenced to be hanged on the tenth day thereafter.

The news was brought to me in my room by the young man's mother, who was utterly broken with grief and shame. She had never a doubt of his innocency, and besought me with many tears and supplications to save him. I had much ado to refrain from giving her positive assurance that her son should not die; but I deemed it better for my purpose that she should suffer ten days of suspense and anguish than that we should come under any suspicion by reason of her serenity and ease of mind. I put her off, therefore, with unsubstantial words of comfort. But my policy was undone that same evening, for about the hour of supper there came to the house a female figure close enshrouded in hood and cloak; and asking speech with me, she was admitted to the chamber wherein I sat with the widow lady, and casting off her hood revealed the wan, sorrowful face of Mistress Jacqueline, the Burgomaster's daughter.

"Oh, sir," she cried, flinging herself upon her knees and clasping her hands piteously, "oh, sir, save my lover! My father condemned him, but he is, I know, the cat's-paw of wicked men. Sir, I beseech you, save my lover!"

I raised her up, and my resolution utterly melted away. I did for the sweet-heart what I had refused to do for the mother, assuring her that Jan Verhoeff should not die, I myself would prevent it; but it was necessary, for the due punishment of those that conspired against him, that none should so much as guess at anything being adventured on his behalf. At this the women were mightily cheered, but the widow bore me a grudge in that I had before withheld this solace from her; and I cannot say but that I deserved it.

I had no certain plan for establishing the treason of Mynheer Volmar; but I was resolved to keep a close watch upon him, deeming it likely that in mere self-confidence he would take a false step. While with exceeding care I held myself in the background, I contrived to learn all that was requisite about his doings. On Sunday I made one of the throng of spectators that witnessed his discharge of a single shot upon the Spanish lines, the which, as the Captain of the Guard had told me, was the charm whereby the city was protected for that day. I observed that the shot was brought from the store by Volmar's own servant; Volmar himself

loaded the culverin, trained it, and set the match to the touch-hole. The burghers, with their wives and children, looked on as at a mystery, and when the shot fell upon some loose earth near the trenches, casting up a cloud of dust, they nodded and smiled, and some clapped their hands; and then they all went forthwith to church, Volmar leading the way.

I was on the point of following them, thinking no little scorn of such mummery as I had just witnessed, when, on casting my eye over the parapet, I observed a Spaniard move slowly towards the spot where the ball had fallen. He stood for a brief space as if contemplating the effect wrought thereby, and then returned within the camp.

Now there was something in the Spaniard's mien that bred a certain doubt in my mind. He had moved slowly, in the manner of a loiterer; and if this was the true measure of his interest, why, I questioned within myself, had he issued from the trenches at all, to observe the spot where a ball had fallen harmlessly, as one had fallen many a Sunday before? His demeanour was not that of a man truly curious. I sought in my mind for some likely explanation of his strange action, and the more I thought upon it, the more puzzled and suspicious I became. But there was nothing to be done on the instant, so I spoke to the sentinel on the parapet, bidding him acquaint me if he saw any further movement among the Spaniards, and then I found the Captain of the Guard, whom I asked to issue the same command to the men that should keep watch in turn for the rest of the day.

At eventide, nothing having been reported to me, I resolved to go forth myself so soon as it became dark and examine the place where the shot had struck. It was an enterprise, I knew, that stood me in some danger, for I might be captured by the Spaniards, or by the burgher guard on my return, and this would bring me under suspicion, and was like to land me in the selfsame nobble as that wherein Jan Verhoeff already lay. I thought for a while of securing myself by acquainting the Captain of the Guard beforehand with my purpose, but seeing that I could have given him no reason for it save by making a clean breast of my suspicions, the which I was loth to do, I held my peace, resolving to take my risk.

Jan Verhoeff had disclosed to me, when I spoke with him in the bailey, the means whereby he had left the city. In the repairs that had been made hastily in the wall battered by the enemy, timber had been employed, and at one place there were two massy logs with a narrow space between, through which he had squeezed himself, and so come within a few spans of the moat. Thither I made my way by a roundabout course as soon as it was dark, and, choosing a moment when no sentinel was within hearing, I slipped into the moat, having left my boots at the foot of the wall, and swam across as quietly as an otter might have done.

On coming to the other side I bent my body low, and crept towards the

Spanish lines, holding my dagger in my right hand. I had observed that the shot fell within a short space of the end of a garden wall which had been almost razed to the ground by the burghers' shots in the first hot days of the leaguer. To the right of this stood the stump of a tree. These were my landmarks, for the shot had come to earth somewhere between the tree and the end of the wall. In the darkness I could not hope to see the pit that the shot had made, but must find it by the touch of my feet.

I crept along by the wall, noiseless in my stockings, and coming to the end of it, bent myself yet lower and groped towards the tree. This I attained without having made any discovery, whereupon I turned about and went back, taking a course somewhat nearer to the moat, and so came again to the wall, having discovered nothing. Yet once more I sought the tree, now choosing a course nearer to the trenches, in which direction I heard the dull murmur of voices, yet not so near as to cause me any present disquietude; and so I groped along the ground until I came to a little hollow, where I halted, thinking it a likely place. There I dug away the earth with my hands, making no more noise than a mouse, and anon my fingers struck upon something hard and cold and round, the which, after a little more digging with hands and dagger, I unearthed, and found to be a round shot, as I had hoped. With this in my hands I stole along towards the shelter of the wall.

Hardly had I come there when I heard voices, somewhat louder than those I had heard before, and immediately after footsteps, coming towards me. I dare go no farther, but crouched behind the brickwork, which was no more than three spans high, holding my breath, and peering over the jagged edge of the wall. And I beheld three men as black blots moving in the darkness towards the very spot I had lately left. One of the three held a dark lantern, by whose light, turned from the city, the others began to search the ground. I heard them utter words of satisfaction when they came to the hole, and then I could not forbear chuckling, for the men, probing with their pikes, and finding nothing, let forth cries of astonishment, together with an oath or two. They consulted one with another, and one proposed that they should search around; but this the man that held the lantern scouted, declaring that he had no manner of doubt the place where they then stood was the end of their quest. Nevertheless his comrades prowled and probed, now to the right, anon to the left, and once came so near me that I gripped my dagger tight, ready to buy my safety with good steel. But they withdrew, and stood for some while talking together of this strange thing, and presently gat them back to their trenches, in marvellous puzzlement.

Thereupon I crept back to the moat, carrying the shot, and having swum across and recovered my boots, the which I could not pull over my wet stockings, I clambered up between the balks of timber, looked about to certify myself the

[image]

*I BEHELD THREE MEN AS BLACK BLOTS MOVING IN THE
DARKNESS*

coast was clear, and hastened by the same circuit to the widow's house.

There my servant was in wait for me, according to my bidding. I took him to my room, and setting the round shot before him, commanded him to examine it. He was a handy fellow, and had the rudiments of more trades than one. It was not long before he discovered, in the surface of the iron, a knob or boss, exceeding small, the which being touched, a narrow channel was revealed, wherein lay a short tube of the thickness of a finger.

"'Tis good locksmith's work, sir," he said with admiration, putting the tube into my hand. I looked therein, and discovered a small roll of paper, the which, upon my spreading it out, I saw was covered with writing in the Spanish tongue, and in the very hand of Volmar, but with no name either at head or at foot. I read the writing with a vast curiosity and eagerness, and what I read was this—

"The victuals will last but one week longer. One of my foes will be hanged; the Englishman I go about to remove. Attack the wall over against the market. I vouch that in ten days the city will yield."

Here was proof of as pretty a piece of villainy as the mind of man could conceive. Verhoeff was to be hanged; I myself to be removed; the wall over against the market was that which the Burgomaster had in charge, and the attack was to be directed thereupon with the intent to harass him and bring him to a frame of mind meet for surrender. A pretty plot indeed, and one that I rejoiced to have the means of circumventing.

I dismissed my servant and sat myself down to consider my ways. 'Twas necessary to my purpose that Volmar should be utterly confounded. I could brook no chance of his wriggling out of the full exposure of his guilt. Wherefore it seemed to me inexpedient that I should at once carry the traitorous letter to the council, for he had many friends therein, whom he might easily persuade that the writing was but a cunning imitation of his own, done by myself out of the despite and enmity I bore him; nor indeed could I explain how I had come by the paper, but by owning that I had gone from the city without authority, a thing he would find means to twist to my disadvantage. The end of my cogitation was that I resolved still to bide my time, not doubting that within the week something would happen to point my road clearly.

When I went abroad next day I perceived that black care had seized upon

the people. The scarcity of victuals was known of all, and as the meaner folk felt the pinch of hunger more dearly they broke forth into murmurs and complaints. Dark looks were cast upon me as I took my way to the council chamber, and still darker met me there. Mindful of Volmar's intent to have me removed, I looked for some instant charge to be brought against me, as though I were a Jonah in the city; but nought was said openly, and I concluded that I must be on my guard against some secret machination—a knife in my back, or a stray bullet did I but show myself upon the ramparts. I was heedful, therefore, that day and the days succeeding, to go only in the middle of the street, and to keep within the house after nightfall, not deeming it any mark of valour to jeopardize the happiness of three good folk and the safety of the city by running into any needless danger.

As day followed day, I became aware that the people's discontent and queasiness was being fomented by the agents of Volmar, though that two-faced villain was most fervent, at the meetings of the council, in admonishing the burghers to endure to the end. Day after day the Spaniards plied their artillery upon the walls, chiefly upon that portion where the Burgomaster was in charge of the defences. The masonry was sore battered, many of the burghers were slain or maimed, and the Burgomaster himself, who endeavoured still to sustain the reputation he had achieved in that night sally, was struck upon the elbow by a fragment of stone, whereby the little man was afflicted more heavily in mind than in body. In his one ear, so to speak, Volmar whispered counsels of despair under a mask of encouragement; in the other I spoke words of comfort and good cheer, assuring him that, could he but resist a little longer, Prince Maurice would come to his succour, as he had promised. My influence, I knew, was sapped by Volmar's guileful insinuations, and I could not doubt that finally I should be worsted unless I could prove Volmar to be the traitor he was.

As the straits of the citizens waxed more grievous, secret messengers were sent forth, to implore aid of Sir Francis Vere and of Prince Maurice; but these men never delivered their messages, as was afterwards discovered, and doubtless Volmar had found means to acquaint the Spaniards with their errand, albeit by means that never came to light. Though I kept as good a watch upon him as I could, and my servant did likewise, we could not find him out in aught that would give us a handle against him, and with the passing of time I grew uncomfortable in mind, fearing lest Jan Verhoeff's ten days' respite should slip away before I had my proofs ready. And I was the more uneasy because I perceived that the ill-will of the burghers towards me increased and spread day by day. Their good favour, which I had at the first procured by my diligence in assisting the defence, had now given place to mistrust and malignity, fostered by Volmar's minions; and I knew that this canker was eating ever more deeply into the souls of the populace.

VII

On the night of Saturday, a device came into my mind whereby I might bring the truth to light in a manner that could not be gainsaid. It was high time, for a great assembly of the citizens had been holden that day, whereat sundry burghers of good standing openly advised that terms should be made with the enemy. There wanted but three days of the period set by Volmar for the surrender of the city, and on the Monday morning Jan Verhoeff was to die. At this assembly, when I essayed to speak to the people, there arose a great uproar in one quarter of the square, where I perceived certain of Volmar's creatures to be gathered. Amid the clamour I heard cries of "Spy!" "Traitor!" and sundry other scandalous appellatives; and a stone being cast at me, the Burgomaster commanded me to withdraw out of the throng, lest a general riot should ensue. Therefore, I say, it was high time I did somewhat, and a device came in happy hour into my mind.

To perform it I must needs make an accomplice, albeit unwitting, of the Captain of the Guard. He was a man of a most steadfast courage, diligent in his duty, a staunch friend to me, and one that would never yield to the enemy save at the uttermost extremity: a pattern of that loyalty and stubborn valour whereby his nation has won liberty and immortal fame; a man withal simple of soul, as witness his belief in the astrological foolery whereof I have made mention. I resolved to turn this very simplicity to account.

I repaired to his house, where he was supping after the fatigues of the day, and after reminding him that the next day was Sunday, I declared that I had discovered a flaw in Mynheer Volmar's talisman. I affected to have a certain skill in reading the stars, and my study of the heavens had shown me that the customary Sunday truce could only be assured by firing a shot of silver, instead of an iron ball as was wont.

"I thank you, sir," said he, accepting my statement with the faith of a child. "We must acquaint Mynheer Volmar withal; for there is but little time to make the silver shot before the Sabbath breaks."

"By your good favour, sir," said I, "this matter must be held a secret 'twixt us two. By the opposition of Jupiter with Mars, and the quartility of Saturn with Venus, I apprehend that the imparting of this matter to any wight whatsoever save only yourself will let loose upon us and the city a myriad evil influences, and all the good we may have of it will be utterly undone."

This I enforced with a long discourse in which I mingled the jargon of the astrologers with a noble array of tags from my Latin grammar, knowing that the captain had no skill in that tongue.

"We will keep it close," he said, having heard me gravely. "Let us go forth-

with and cast a silver ball in the armoury. I will employ thereto some of my own plate; nothing of all my goods would I withhold from the service of the city.”

We went at once about this task, and the ball having been cast, the Captain of the Guard took it home with him, promising to bring it forth at the due moment on the morrow.

”We must be ready to encounter some opposition from Mynheer Volmar,” I said on leaving him. ”He is like to take ill aught that may seem to bring in question his reading of the stars.”

”Beshrew that,” answered the captain. ”All that pertains to the defence of the city is in my charge, and things must be done as I command.”

”Without doubt, sir,” said I. ”Yet you must look for wrath, yea, even stout resistance on the part of Mynheer Volmar, and I know not what ill consequence may ensue if he has his way.”

And so I wrought the simple captain to a strong resolution to defy Volmar, and bear down any opposition he might make.

On the morrow I set forth betimes for the ramparts. Among the concourse of people going afoot to witness the firing of the Sunday shot I espied the Burgomaster and his daughter, and accosted them with a civil salutation. The Burgomaster looked exceeding ill at ease, shunned my eye, and presently turned me a cold shoulder, conversing with a neighbour. Thereupon Mistress Jacqueline lightly touched my sleeve, and I fell back a pace with her. I observed that her face was very wan and haggard, and was moved to pity her.

”Sir,” she said in a whisper, ”shall Jan die to-morrow?”

”Courage!” I said, in her tone. ”All will yet be well.”

”I have a thing to say,” she proceeded. ”Last night I heard my father talking with—you know whom. To-morrow the order will be given to the Captain of the Guard to arrest you.”

[image]

*”TO-MORROW THE ORDER WILL BE GIVEN TO THE CAPTAIN
OF THE GUARD TO ARREST YOU”*

”So ho!” I said under my breath. ”I thank you, mistress. Time will show.”

We said no more, but went on among the others.

When we came to the ramparts, Volmar’s man was even then bringing a shot from the storehouse, and Volmar himself stood waiting by the culverin. But the Captain of the Guard, so soon as he saw me, stepped forth with the silver shot in his hand, and entered upon a discourse with Volmar, acquainting him

with his purpose and the reason thereof, but not naming me as the author. While they conversed a dark and wrathful look lowered upon Volmar's swarthy countenance, and he protested stoutly against any meddling with the course indicated by the stars; but when the Captain of the Guard showed himself resolute, Volmar shrugged his shoulders with an air of disdain and stood aside, as one that disavows all part and lot in an act of folly. Seeing his man standing there still holding the iron shot, he bade him set it down, and smiled upon the gaping throng that gazed as upon some high and mystic rite.

Now it was necessary to my purpose that nothing should start a suspicion in Volmar's mind or render him in any way uneasy; for which reason I had up to this present held myself backward among the press. But it was also necessary that I should possess myself of Volmar's shot; wherefore, while all eyes were intent upon the Captain of the Guard ramming the silver shot into the culverin, I whispered my servant to go privily and scratch a double cross upon the iron ball where it lay, the which he accomplished without being observed.

The Captain of the Guard, doing all things with a portentous gravity of demeanour, had now charged the culverin, and, to the great wonderment of the populace, he beckoned me forward and placed the burning match in my hands and bade me fire the gun. I had no skill in artillery work, but I accepted the task with becoming modesty, and trained the piece as near as I could upon a flag that waved on the Spanish trenches. Then putting the match to the touch-hole, I stood back, the shot flew forth, and the sight of all was obscured by the thick smoke. But a moment after a great shout broke from the assembled multitude, and looking to see what occasioned it, I beheld with amazement that the flag no longer flaunted it upon the trench. My shot, fired at a venture, had, I suppose, stricken the flagstaff in two.

The Captain of the Guard made me many compliments on my skill, and the folk that stood around looked on me somewhat more kindly, taking the fall of the flag as an omen of good. Volmar darted upon me a look of venom, and then glanced in the manner of one fearful and uneasy towards his own shot; but seeing it lie where the man had placed it, he had no more qualms or misgiving. Then the good folk departed cheerfully to church, and Volmar, bidding his man carry the iron shot back to the storehouse, joined himself to the throng and walked by the side of Mistress Jacqueline, who cast down her eyes and said no word in answer to his soft speeches.

I went beside the Captain of the Guard, and entered the church among the rearmost; but during the singing of the psalm I slipped away quietly to the storehouse, found the shot by means of the mark that my servant had made upon it, and conveyed it to my lodging. Upon opening it, I discovered a small roll of paper, with this writing—

"The Burgomaster is come to a reasonable frame of mind. To-morrow the Englishman will be arrested; on the next day in the Council I shall declare that our scarcity of victuals and munition forbids a longer resistance; and a trusty friend will make formal proposition that we yield the city."

Having now the game in my hands, I ate my meagre dinner with a good relish, and immediately thereafter set forth to visit Mynheer Cosmo Volmar. He had just risen from his meal, very comfortably replete, for notwithstanding the general shortness of provisions he had contrived to procure himself a sufficiency of good food and wine. Secure in his approaching triumph, he smiled in his beard when I was ushered in, and bade me seat myself with a courtesy that he had never shown me heretofore.

"Mynheer," I said gravely, "the city is in parlous case. The Prince is tardy in coming to our succour, and I fear we can scarce hold out another week."

"Why, sir," said he, "are you become chicken-hearted?—you that came hither expressly to encourage and sustain us! Little you know the spirit of our burghers if you suppose that, even in this darksome hour, they will yield up the city."

"Truly the spirit of the most of them is undaunted," I said; "and I could well believe that, but for the malign presence and pestilent contriving of traitors, they would endure even yet."

"Ah! Traitors!" said he. "Well, we hang a traitor to-morrow, and his fate will teach a wholesome lesson to any that be like-minded."

"It may be that others will hang with him," said I, fixing my eyes upon him. "Will you lend me your ear while I relate a story? It chanced that some few weeks ago, being set upon in the country yonder by a troop of Spaniards, I and my little company were only saved by the timely help of certain peasants, whereby we put the enemy to rout. But a man of my party, pursuing them, overtook and slew one of them, and possessed himself of a paper that he carried in his doublet."

Here I made a pause.

"Proceed, sir," said he, smiling. "I protest the beginning is very well."

"That paper," I continued, with measured gravity, "I hold now in my pocket, together with two others, the which have come into my possession in strange wise since I entered your city; and most strange, they are writ in the selfsame hand as the first. Moreover, they are one and all of the same tenor, to wit, dwelling on the dire straits whereinto this city has fallen, and furnishing hints concerning a party within the walls—a party of one or mayhap two or three—that is plotting to render up the city into the hands of the enemy." While I spoke I fastened my eyes intently upon him, and I saw the fashion of his countenance suffer a change,

and in his eyes a look of hate and terror commingled. I went on:—"Sir, they are simple souls that believe the stars order our lives and destinies, and it were easy to persuade such that a shot, whether it be of silver or of iron, fired under planetary influence, should cast as it were a spell even upon a ruthless foe. Yet methinks their simplicity would suffer a rude shock did they know that a round shot may carry a message, not from the heavens, mystically, but—"

And here my speech had a sudden end, for Volmar, his face livid with rage and fear, leapt from his seat, whipped out his sword, and flew upon me with the ferocity of a wild beast. But that a stool stood between us, a stumbling block to him in his fury, I had peradventure been pierced to the heart or ever I could draw my own weapon. That obstacle gave me a bare respite. My sword was out and met his clashing, and for the space of five minutes we thrust and lunged, parried and riposted, in the middle of the floor, over the table, by the mantel, in the corners, as the stress of combat carried us. I had always the advantage of him in that I was calm and master of myself, whereas he was drunken with rage, maddened by hate, and desperately fearful of the gallows he had set up for Jan Verhoeff. In mere swordsmanship he was not far from being my equal; had he been in truth my equal, his skill might have prevailed even over his fury. Suffice it to say that after a hot bout of some five minutes I struck his sword from his hand, and pinning him down upon a chair, with my blade at his throat, I bade him sternly give heed to certain conditions on which I would spare his vile and wretched life.

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*PINNING HIM DOWN UPON A CHAIR, I BADE HIM STERNLY
GIVE HEED TO CERTAIN CONDITIONS ON WHICH I WOULD
SPARE HIS LIFE*

These were, first, that he should write, at my dictation, a full confession of his guilt and treasons, such as should at the same time clear Jan Verhoeff from the accusation made against him. Second, that he should quit the city that night by seven of the clock, and until then keep within doors. The clemency of these conditions wondrously astonished him; and perceiving that he was utterly at my mercy, he accepted them without demur. Within an hour I had his confession, sealed, in my pocket, together with the other papers in his hand.

You may wonder that I showed mercy to so heinous a villain: hear my reasons. I might have slain him; but then I should have had no confession, such as I needed to right Jan Verhoeff. I might have extorted the confession from him,

and then delivered him to the council for formal trial and meet punishment; but then many things would have come to light that it were best to keep hidden, especially the questionable part played by the Burgomaster, the which for the sake of the city, and more also for the sake of Mistress Jacqueline, I would fain leave enshrouded. Furthermore, I had now the hold upon goodman Burgomaster that I needed to assure the happiness of two young souls.

Leaving Volmar a shrunken heap in his chair, and being fully assured that Bargaen would be no more troubled with him, I made my way to Mynheer Warmond's house. As I came to the door, there issued forth the Captain of the Guard, whose countenance put on a most sorrowful look when he beheld me. He halted upon the threshold, heaved a sigh, then took me by the sleeve and said—

"Sir, I hold a warrant for your arrest under the hand and seal of the Burgomaster, and to be executed at seven of the clock to-morrow morning."

"Let not that trouble you," said I, and had he been my own countryman, in my gaiety of heart I should have poked him in the ribs; such a pleasantry is inexpedient with a Dutch burgher. "Come for me here within a half hour, and I avouch your warrant will be annulled."

He left me, wondering.

I entered to the Burgomaster, who fell a-trembling when he saw me, and demanded with a stammering tongue what my business was with him upon the Sabbath. I told him very shortly, and never in my life have I seen so piteous a spectacle as that little round rubicund man at the hearing of my story. His conscience pricked him sore, in that he had harkened to ill counsels and dallied with the thought of surrendering. His lips quivered, his limbs shook as with palsy, and with the back of his hand he brushed away the tears that coursed down his fat cheeks. He besought me very earnestly to advise him what he must do, mingling together in lamentable outcry his good name and his daughter that loved him.

[image]

I TOLD HIM VERY SHORTLY, AND NEVER IN MY LIFE HAVE I SEEN SO PITEOUS A SPECTACLE AS THAT LITTLE ROUND RUBICUND MAN AT THE HEARING OF MY STORY

"Mynheer," said I, "there are two things you may do. The first is, to keep silence. This unhappy business is known wholly to none but you, Cosmo Volmar, and myself—and in part to my servant and Jan Verhoeff, who have their reasons for holding their peace. The second is, to undo the wrong you have done your

daughter and her promised husband. Thus you will both preserve the reputation for courage you won at the point of the ham bone”—(I could not withhold this quip)—”and win a new renown for fatherly indulgence and magnanimity of soul.”

Upon this the Burgomaster looked somewhat more cheerfully; but again his face fell, and he turned away his eyes, as with a faltering voice he told me that he had ordered my arrest.

”And here is the Captain of the Guard,” said I, as I heard his clanking step without, ”come for the cancelment of your warrant.”

The Burgomaster was overcome with humiliation when aware that I knew already of the warrant. He tore the paper passionately across, and wept hot tears when he placed the captain’s hand in mine and bade him cherish me as an honest man. There was ever something of the play actor about goodman Burgomaster.

And now I have told my story. You may like to know that the city did not yield to the Spaniards, but held out for a good month beyond, and was then relieved by Prince Maurice, who advanced through a fierce rainstorm at the head of a large and well-furnished army. I was presented to him on his entrance by Sir Francis Vere, who with a grave countenance related how he had chosen me, as one expert in war and cunning in counsel, to assist the burghers in their extremity. When the Prince had thanked me in the name of the United States of the Netherlands, and invited me to continue in his service, Sir Francis drew me aside and said in my ear—

”Thou’rt a cunning rascal, and be hanged to thee.”

But I leave you to say whether ’twas cunning that served me best.

The praises and blessings heaped upon me by the two ladies, the mother and the sweetheart of Jan Verhoeff, were dearer to me even than the commendation of Prince Maurice. Methinks it is better to make two or three happy than to take a fenced city. In the spring of the next year Jan wrote me word that he had been made councillor and town clerk of Bargaen, and was now the husband of pretty Mistress Jacqueline.

I had almost forgot to say that such pricks of conscience as beset me for permitting Volmar to escape a traitor’s doom were stilled but a few days after he in secret quitted the city. His dead body was then discovered in the moat. Whether he was drowned in swimming, or removed (as he would have said) by the Spaniards for that he had failed them, I know not; only I believe in my heart that justice was done.

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tailpiece to Third Part

Interim

Many a time and oft did my grandfather sing the praises of Prince Maurice of Nassau, whom he loved as a man, revered as a prince, and admired as a warrior. He told me that this stout and worthy Prince had studied the art of war from a boy up, and made many innovations in the practice thereof, for the which this age is to him much beholden; namely, he armed his horsemen with the carbine instead of the lance, and taught his soldiers the true use of the spade in siege work. Before his time men of war were wont to scorn that humble tool, and to look upon such as handled it as boors and rascals. My grandfather was with him in the three months' siege of Groningen, and beheld with admiration the work of his sappers and miners, how they drove mines in the shape of the letter Y beneath the walls of the city, and springing them one night, the north ravelin was blown up into the air with forty of the garrison, of whom one was cast alive and sound at his very feet in the besiegers' camp.

He told me too how in the summer of the year 1595, he came very near to losing his life. Prince Maurice had raised the siege of Grol, drawing back before the troops of Christopher Mondragon, a little old man of ninety-two, who had practised war from his youth, yet without receiving a wound. The Prince laid an ambush for this marvellous warrior, and set his cousin Philip to accomplish it; but the old man heard of what was toward, and took measures to counter it, so that when, about daybreak, Count Philip sent forward a handful of men to pounce upon the enemy's pickets, they saw themselves faced by a great number of Spanish horsemen drawn up in order. Whereof when tidings were conveyed to Count Philip, he donned his casque, and drew his sword, and putting spurs to his horse, galloped into the lane that divided him from the Spaniards, being followed at the first only by four of his nobles, and then by others of his horsemen, among whom my grandfather was one.

And when they were shut in that narrow pass, up started the Spaniards on the watery pasture lands on either hand, and fired their guns at them very hotly. Count Philip was shot through the body from a harquebus, which, by reason of its closeness, set his clothes a-fire, and the flames could not be quenched save by rolling him, all wounded as he was, among the sand and heather. When he sought to mount his horse and ride away, his strength failed him, and he fell to the ground and was taken prisoner and carried away dying. My grandfather, following in the charge, was thrown from his horse in the disorder and confusion, and only saved himself by crawling through the hedge, and swimming the river that ran by the margin of the field.

A matter of three months thereafter, my grandfather was with Sir Francis

Vere when that valiant captain was sent by Prince Maurice to take the castle of Weerd. Upon Sir Francis demanding that the warden of the castle should yield it up, that doughty commander refused him with scorn, albeit he had no more than a score and six men at his back. But when Sir Francis opened upon the place with his artillery, these folk fell into a panic and laid open their gates. Their captain claimed the honours of war, but Sir Francis made answer that he should have no honours but halters for the stiff-necked simple men that had dared to defend their hovel against ordnance. Whereupon he made the six and twenty draw lots with black and white straws, and they that drew the white were immediately hanged, save only the thirteenth, to whom his life was given after that he had consented to do hangman's work upon his fellows. The noose was cast first about the neck of their captain, but the rope parting asunder, certain of Sir Francis' men held him under the water of the ditch until he was drowned. My grandfather fell out with Sir Francis upon this matter, deeming his truculency to be unworthy of a gentleman; and when the troops went into winter quarters, he took ship and returned to England, bearing a richly gilt sword, the gift of Prince Maurice.

He then took up his place in the Queen's Guard, but had accomplished scarce four months in the royal service when that adventure befell which follows next in order. It was known that King Philip was making ready a fleet of sixty sail to invade Ireland, and Sir Walter Raleigh was instant that the Queen's ministers should destroy that fleet in Spanish waters, saying that "expedition in a little is better than much too late." At that time the Spaniards were rejoicing in that Hawkins and Drake had come to grief in their enterprise against Panama, and were dead of a broken heart. Sir Walter's counsel was deemed good, and the Queen, enraged with the King of Spain for that he was abetting the Irish rebel Tyrone, fitted out ninety-six sail to convey 14,000 Englishmen to the harbour of Cadiz, setting over them Lord Admiral Howard and the Earl of Essex, and granting to Raleigh the command of twenty-two ships. Contrary winds delayed their setting forth, the which, as Sir Walter affirmed, caused him deeper grief than he ever felt for anything of this world. And Providence so fashioned it that my grandfather performed a hardy feat in Cadiz harbour a good month before Sir Walter set sail, as you shall now read.

THE FOURTH PART

CHRISTOPHER RUDD'S ADVENTURE IN SPAIN,
AND THE FASHION IN WHICH HE PLAYED
THE PART OF A PHYSICIAN

[image]

headpiece to Fourth Part

I

It has never been my lot to hold great place, whether in the employment of Queen Bess, or of her successor, King James; and when I think how sorely fortune hath buffeted some noble persons that served those monarchs, I count myself lucky in my obscurity.

Of all the noble men with whom I ever had to do, Sir Walter Raleigh was in my computation beyond compare the noblest. It frets me still, after forty years, that I was not of his company on that famous voyage to Cadiz when, as he writes in his History, "we stayed not to pick any lock, but brake open the doors, and, having rifled all, threw the key into the fire"; by the which figure he signifies the capture and destruction of that great town, with vast spoils both of merchandise and money. I was stayed but by accident, or, more truly, by the hand of God, who had other work for me, as you shall hear.

It chanced that one day, about Easter of the year 1596, I had been to visit Sir Walter in his house at Mile End, where he then lived to take the country air, and because, being out of favour with the Queen, his lodging in her great house by the Thames was not much to his liking. In name he was still Captain of the Guard and Warden of the Stannaries, but the former office was performed by one Master John Best, and the latter was, I think, in abeyance. He had but lately returned from his voyage to Guiana, and was even then occupied with the writing of the book wherein he relates his doings there, together with certain wonders that I must hold to be fables. It is clean against nature that men should have eyes in their shoulders and mouths in their breasts.

I had visited him, I say, and sat talking very late, finding him wrapt up in his project against Cadiz, where a Spanish fleet was fitting out with the intent to invade Ireland. It was understood, when I left him, that I should be one of

his company in the *Warspright*, provided I could obtain leave from the Queen to quit my place in the royal Guard for a season. I rode back to Westminster, and, having stabled my horse, was proceeding on foot to my lodging, in a little mean street by the river, when it seemed to me on a sudden that I heard footsteps, as of one dogging me. It was very late, as I said; all honest folks (myself excepted) were abed; and having a modest love of myself, I halted and whipped out my sword, peering into the darkness, and stretching my ears for the sound that had brought me to a check. But all was silent as the grave, and I laughed a little when it came into my mind that peradventure 'twas no more than the echo of my own footsteps. Whereupon I put up my sword and went on, my thoughts being busy with the matters of Sir Walter's glowing discourse.

While I was thus rapt away, building, I doubt not, fantastical castles in Spain, on a sudden I was set upon by a hulking fellow that threw himself upon me out of a dark alley-way. The first warning I had of him was a sharp crack as the bludgeon he aimed at me struck a shop-sign that hung low over the street; but for this, without question I had suffered a broken skull. Even so I lacked time to draw sword or dagger, for the man flung aside his club and sprang upon me, grappling me to himself with a grip of iron. For a moment I yielded, out of policy, to his embrace, being careful, nathless, to maintain my footing; then, being very well practised in wrestling, and having good command of my breath, I dipt my arms about his middle and, with an ease that amazed me, gave him the backfall. Down he went upon the cobbles, and I stood over him while he lay and groaned.

[image]

*DOWN HE WENT UPON THE COBBLES, AND I STOOD OVER
HIM WHILE HE LAY AND GROANED*

At this hour of the night it were vain to look for any help from the watch, and I was in the mind to leave the fellow where he lay. Yet having a certain curiosity to see what manner of man he was, I felt in my fob for the steel and flint I was wont to carry, and when I found them not, only then remembered that I had left them on Sir Walter's table; he had borrowed them of me to light his pipe of tobacco, the which was a wondrous strange thing in those days. (That is Sir Walter's pipe, yonder in my cabinet; he gave it me for a keepsake a little while ere he died.) Having no light at command I resolved to bring the man to my own door, but a few steps distant; wherefore I stooped and hoisted him to his feet, and then took him by the collar with one hand, and with the other held my naked sword to his posteriors, and so marched him before me up the street. When we

came to my door, and my servant opened to my knock, I thrust the man in front of me so that he stood within the light of the lamp.

He was a sorry knave, now that I beheld him clearly: a very ragged Robin, as foul in person as ever I saw. But I understood now the reason why I had so easily thrown him, for his countenance, so much of it as I could discern through a thick and tangled beard, was wan and sunken; his eyes shone with that glitter which bespeaks famine or fever; and his body, goodly in its proportions, was bent and shrunken together. In good sooth I had no cause to be vain of my prowess, and when the fellow turned his burning eyes upon me, regarding me sullenly, yet with no touch of fear, I was seized with compassion, and bade my servant go fetch meat and drink. He went about my bidding sluggishly, halting ever and anon to cast a backward glance, as though doubting the policy of playing good Samaritan to so uncouth and villainous an oaf. While he was absent I told the man that since he would surely be hanged for his attempt upon me, 'twere well he should eat and so fortify himself against his destiny. What I said in jest he took in earnest; but whether it be true or not, as I have heard tell, that with the hangman's noose dangling before him a criminal has no relish for food, certainly this man fell with very keen tooth upon my viands, and cleaned the platter with marvellous celerity.

Having dispatched my servant to bed, I sat me on the table and questioned the man, why he had waylaid me. He was loth to speak, but by little and little I drew from him his history, which he related not as one seeking to move pity, but by way of recompense, so it seemed to me, for the hospitality he had received. With his first words I own my heart warmed to him, for his speech smacked of my own country in the west, though intermixed with many quaint outlandish terms. His story I will relate in brief.

His name was William Stubbs, and he was born at Winterbourne Abbas, not a great way from my own birthplace. He had gone young to sea, and made several voyages with Master Cavendish, having indeed served as boatswain in the *Desire* with that worthy seaman and commander. He had roved the Spanish Main, and I proved his veracity in that particular by putting to him sundry questions begotten of my own knowledge. 'Twas plain that he had the common fault of seamen, spending his gains more quickly than he earned them, roistering it on shore while his money lasted, and when all was spent going to sea again in quest of more. But I perceived as he proceeded in his discourse that he was better than most in natural wit, and had made more profit of his adventures, in knowledge if not in pelf. He had a passable facility in both the French and the Spanish tongues, and his head was stuffed with a great quantity of curious information, which made me wonder that he had sunk so low as to become a common footpad.

The reason of that I learnt in order. Being on board the *Revenge* in that

unlucky voyage of Sir Richard Grenville, he fell with many of his comrades into the hands of the Spaniards, who dealt with him very scurvily, as their custom is, and finally condemned him to the galleys. For three long years he was chained to an oar, and suffered all the miseries of unhappy prisoners in the like case. But it befell one day that the galley wherein he rowed fell foul of a Dutch vessel, which opened upon it with valorous broadsides, and after making havoc as well among the slaves as the crew, finally rammed it with great vehemency and stove a hole in its side. In the hottest of the fight, a round shot broke the chain that held Stubbs to his oar, and, seizing the moment when the Dutchman rammed and all was confusion, he leapt overboard and swam to that vessel, whose side he clambered up by the main chains. He came very near perishing at the hands of the crew, who at first supposed him to be a rascal; but when they learnt his true condition, they hauled him aboard with comfortable words, and brought him after many days to their own country. Thence he contrived to reach London, only to fall on evil hap, for his sufferings in captivity had sapped his strength, and, when he sought employment in his own trade he found no master mariner willing to accept him. Thus, reduced by sickness and famine, in his desperate strait he bethought him of conquering fortune on the highway, but was now ready to believe, seeing the unhappy issue of his first essay in that line of life, that he was at odds with Fate, and must needs, as he said, "kick the beam and ha' done with it."

When I heard this piteous story, and saw upon the man's neck and wrists the scars that were full proof, to all that knew the Spaniards, of his having rowed in their galleys, my anger against him was wholly quenched. I told him heartily that he should not hang for me, and then, perceiving that my good food had wrought upon his sickly frame, I bade him get himself into a closet wherein my servant kept my boots and sleep there for the night, promising to see him again in the morning, and perchance do somewhat to set him on his feet. The man was clean staggered by this kindness, as I could plainly see; but he did not thank me; and when he had crept into the closet and flung himself down heedless upon the floor, I turned the key in the lock for security's sake and went to my bed.

My servant was in a pretty fret and fume when he found the man there asleep in the morning, and eyed me with a disfavour that made me feel guilty towards him: a good servant hath in him something of the tyrant. When I bade him give my guest water for washing (whereof he was in great need), and meat and beer, his silence was a clear rebuke. But when he came again after doing my bidding he had somewhat to tell me.

"The rogue asked me your name, sir," quoth he, "and when I told him, he asked further whether you were akin to one Master Christopher Rudd of Shirley."

"And what said you?" I asked, knowing my servant.

"I said, sir, that he were best wash himself."

"A proper answer," said I, laughing. "When he has eaten, bring him to me."

And when the man came before me, cleaned of his foulness and with his beard trimmed, I saw that he was a goodly fellow, and felt the more sorry for him.

"You asked of one Master Christopher Rudd of Shirley," I said; "what have you to do with him?"

"Are you his kin, sir?" he asked doubtfully.

"We are of one family," I said, "and now you will answer my question."

And then he told me a story that filled me with as much trouble as amazement. Chained to him, on his galley, had been a young Frenchman, whom, even before their common misery had made them friends, he had surmised to be a man of rank. When they had learnt to trust each other, the Frenchman and he often talked together of the chances of escape, and each promised the other that, should fortune favour him, he would use his endeavours for behoof of him that was left. Stubbs said that, for his part, he feared he could do little, being an Englishman; whereupon the Frenchman told him that he had sundry good friends among the English, notably Christopher Rudd, of whom indeed he had been a close comrade in the service of King Henry of Navarre.

At this I pricked up my ears, and inquired eagerly for the Frenchman's name. Thereupon Stubbs rolled up his sleeves, and showed me, branded upon his arm, the letters "R. de T.," confessing that he had forgot the name, which indeed did not come easily to his tongue. I needed no more, but knew instantly that the luckless galley-slave could be none other than Raoul de Torcy, who had been my boon fellow when I was in France, and my companion that time when I had the good hap to win King Henry's favour. I bade Stubbs describe with circumstance the look and character of the Frenchman, and though he was unapt at such a task, his uncouth phrases gave me the assurance I sought, and I could have no manner of doubt that the man now swinking and sweating in one of the worst tortures ever devised by the wit of man was indeed my dear friend.

I taxed Stubbs narrowly, to discover by what mishap Raoul, a gentleman of France, had fallen to so pitiful an extremity, but on this point it appeared that Raoul himself was at a loss. He had been kidnapped one day in Calais, cast on board a vessel, and carried to Cadiz: who were his captors, and what moved them to it, were matters hidden from him.

Cadiz being the place of Raoul's exile, I instantly bethought me of my talk overnight with Sir Walter Raleigh, and saw in his projected enterprise a means of wresting my friend from his bondage. Accordingly I sent my servant for my horse, purposing to ride again to Mile End and acquaint Sir Walter with what I had heard. I gave money to Stubbs wherewith to buy new raiment, bidding him return to my house and await me, and above all to avoid any debate with my

servant, the which might easily end in broken heads.

I found Sir Walter in his garden, smoking a pipe of tobacco, and setting potatoes, the new root that he had brought from the Indies, in the earth in the manner they call dibbling. He heard me attentively, and let out a round oath or two, and said that assuredly I might make the enlargement of my friend my personal charge in the adventure.

[image]

I FOUND SIR WALTER IN HIS GARDEN

"But you must know, Rudd," he said, "that the project is as yet a secret, and indeed there is no surety that the Queen will give consent thereto. Her Grace frowns on me most malevolently, and there are many hindrances to surmount ere I come by her august approval. Were it not better to ransom your friend? I doubt not he hath kinsmen that are ignorant of his plight, and would bestir themselves did they but know it."

I answered him that Raoul had spoken to me of an uncle, but as to ransom, Raoul himself must have thought thereon. Without doubt he would have acquainted the Spaniards with his rank, and their cupidity would not have refused to bargain for his enlargement, unless, peradventure, they had weightier reasons for holding him a prisoner. To this Sir Walter assented, and confessed that he saw nothing for it but to wait until the Queen's pleasure in the matter of the intended voyage was known, and with that I had to be content.

I returned to my lodging, sore downcast and perplexed. Stubbs was already there, new clothed in decent garments, and very personable. I fell a-talking to him, and in the midst a thought came suddenly to me. I knew the strange waywardness of the Queen, how she would one moment consent, the next deny her words with hearty swearing; it might be months, or even years, before Sir Walter had his way. It troubled me sorely to think that Raoul should endure his wretched lot while her Highness played see-saw, and I bethought me that I might at least voyage to France and see the kinsmen who were, I doubted not, mourning Raoul's disappearance, and might perchance devise with them some plan for his deliverance. And since the testimony of an eye-witness is ever more effectual than report at second-hand, I resolved to take my mariner with me, so as they might have from his own lips the tale he told me. I forbore to ask consent of the Queen to my absence, being resolved to hazard my place rather than my design.

We set off next day, riding to Dover, where we embarked upon a packet-boat, and so came, after much tossing and discomfort, to Calais. This being the

port where Raoul had been kidnapped three years before, as Stubbs told me, I made discreet inquiry among the harbour people whether they knew aught of that villainy, being careful to name no names. But none had any knowledge of the matter, whereupon we rode on at once to Dieppe, both because that was the nearest port to Raoul's château, and because our common friend Jean Prévost dwelt there, whom I purposed to take into my confidence.

'Twas drawing towards evening when we came to the town and reined up at the door of the *Belle Etoile*, a hostelry that I knew very well. The host, honest Jacques Aicard, remembered me, though it was near seven years since he last saw me, and welcomed me very heartily. The goodman's face was rueful when he ushered me to a room.

"'Tis pity, monsieur," he said, "that I have no better chamber to offer, but my best room is bespoke. But if monsieur will be content with this for a night or two, be sure that he shall have the best when my other visitor departs."

I assured him that the room would do very well, since I did not purpose to make a long stay.

"Ah, monsieur," he said, "that is sad news. I would that I had more guests like monsieur," a piece of arrant flattery whereat I smiled. 'Tis true that honest Jacques loved an Englishman.

Having seen Stubbs also provided, I hastened forth, and by good luck found Jean Prévost at home. He likewise welcomed me with great heartiness, and, after our salutations, as he set wine before me, he opened upon the very matter which had brought me to him.

"Would that Raoul were with us!" he said. "How we three laughed! But I fear me we shall never see him more."

"He disappeared; that I know," said I. "Tell me how it befell."

"Why, three years ago he rode to Calais, with the intent to sail to the Low Countries, and use his sword against the Spaniards. We have never heard of him since. Whether he was wrecked, or fell in Flanders, we know not. He vanished utterly away."

"And what of his estate?" I asked.

"His uncle holds it, the Count de Sarney. You have heard Raoul speak of him. He was a Leaguer, and there was a coldness between them. Indeed, though their châteaux lie but five miles apart, they had no dealings one with the other for many years. But the breach was healed when Henry became king, and after that Raoul had disappeared none was so busy as the Count in seeking for him. He sent emissaries at his own charges to Flanders to inquire diligently in all likely quarters, and 'twas a full year before he entered upon his heritage. He lives at Torcy, much by himself, and we see little of him."

"Raoul lugs an oar in a galley at Cadiz," I said with a very quiet voice.

Jean leapt from his seat as though a wasp had stung him.

"A galley-slave! Impossible! Incredible!" he cried.

"Both credible and possible," I said, and then I told him all, as I have told you.

"Mon Dieu!" cried Jean, when I had made an end. "We must not wait while your Queen dallies. A ransom! I know a score of his friends who will give bonds for goodly sums—"

"Ay, truly," I said, interrupting him, "and the first of them should be his uncle and heir."

Jean stopped in his restless pacing of the floor, and looked at me very strangely.

"Why yes," he said, "his uncle, to be sure. But the Count is close-fisted; 'twas indeed a surprise to all the country-side when, after that he had entered into possession of Torcy—an estate of greater worth than his own—he showed himself a very niggard."

"Think you that he would refuse his mite in so good a cause?" I said.

Again Jean looked strangely at me, and for a while was silent. Then he said slowly—

"My friend, I ween we had best say nought to the Count de Sarney."

"Nevertheless, I go to him to-morrow," I replied. "Miser he may be, and 'tis clean against his interest, to be sure, to bring back the lawful owner of Torcy, and thereby dispossess himself. Yet if his duty be put to him, as I shall put it, I doubt not he will comply."

"I will go with you," said Jean.

"Nay, I am minded to go alone, or rather with none but my mariner. 'Twill be better so. Be assured I will acquaint you with the issue. And I beg you, Jean," I said earnestly, "that you speak no word of what I have told you, at least for this present time."

"I will be mute as a fish," said he, "but I shall think the more."

II

On the morrow, early in the morning, we saddled our horses, Stubbs and I, a thing we always performed ourselves, Stubbs somewhat fumblingly, I own, until practice gave him deftness and ease. 'Twas thirty miles to Torcy, that lay southerly from Dieppe, but we made such good speed that the sun was not yet in the zenith when we arrived at the château. The Count was within doors, said the

lackey that opened the great gate of the park to us, and we rode up the avenue of chestnuts, just bourgeoning into leaf, and came after some three furlongs to the house.

The man that admitted me, an ancient retainer of Raoul's whom I knew very well, changed hue when he saw me, and asked me with trembling voice whether I had brought news of his master. I did not give him a direct answer, but bade him lead me at once to the Count, feeling not a little pleasure that the new lord still kept the old man in his service. He conducted me through the passages that I had last trod with Raoul himself, and brought me into the little chamber wherein I had passed many a merry evening with my friend. Stubbs meanwhile remained in the outer porch, ready to follow me at my summons.

I waited some while before the Count entered. He was a man of mean stature, very lean and dry, and with a grave cast of countenance wherein I discerned no likeness to the jolly favour of his nephew.

"I have not the honour," he began courteously as I bowed to him, and dealt me a shrewd look.

"Assuredly not, monsieur," I replied. "My name is Christopher Rudd, and I was once comrade to your nephew, whose fate has given such deep trouble to his friends."

"Ah yes, my poor nephew! Methinks I recall your name, monsieur, if you are the same that fought with Raoul in the late contention, now so happily concluded. Be seated, monsieur; I am charmed to meet one that was his friend. You will honour me by taking a cup of wine?"

He rang for a servant, and bade him bring wine and cakes, and also to request the company of Monsieur Armand. Before the man returned there entered into the room a solemn-visaged youth, clad in black with white ruffles at his wrists.

"My son, monsieur," said the Count. "He is but lately returned from Paris, where he has studied medicine and philosophy, not that I purpose that he should be either a physician or a philosopher, but because I deem it well that he, being my heir, but ill-fitted by reason of a delicate constitution for the pursuit of arms, should have some tincture of humane letters and of the beneficent art of healing. Situated as we are, somewhat remote from towns, it is fitting that one who will in due time be lord of many poor folks should be able to minister to them in their afflictions."

"A right worthy and commendable desire," I said, looking at the youth, whose solemnity of countenance somewhat tickled me.

The Count proceeded to expound the usefulness of philosophy, not interrupting his discourse when the servant returned with wine and delicacies which, being sharp-set after my ride, I devoured with relish. My host was so courteously

bent on entertaining me that for a good while I found no opportunity of broaching the purpose of my visit, and more than once I thought of Stubbs waiting without, and certainly as hungry as myself. But perceiving at length in the Count's physiognomy a look that said clearly, despite his courtesy, that he thought it time my visit came to an end, I profited by a slight lull in his discourse to say—

"And my friend Raoul, monsieur—has nothing been heard of him?"

"Nothing, monsieur," he said with a sigh. "I fear we cannot hope to see him again, and the pain of his loss is embittered by our ignorance of his fate, whether he lies at the bottom of the sea, or perchance in some nameless grave."

"I rejoice, then," said I, "that I can assuage that bitterness, even though the knowledge has a bitterness of its own. Your nephew, monsieur, is at this moment, unless death has released him, suffering the tortures of a galley-slave in Spain."

A cry from the solemn youth caused me to look at him, and I own I was glad to see a spark of life in his dead face.

"What a monstrous thing!" he cried. "Was he taken prisoner in Flanders, monsieur?"

"Nay," I said, "he never fought in Flanders. He travelled no further than Calais. He was there kidnapped at the harbour, and thence conveyed to Cadiz. 'Twas the work of private enemies, beyond doubt."

"Will you tell us how you came by this amazing news, monsieur?" said the Count, in his thin cold voice.

Whereupon I related the whole story with circumstance, from the time when I was beset that night as I returned to my lodging. The Count listened to me with a courteous interest, but a look of compassion stole upon his face.

"It is incredible, monsieur," he said, when I ended my tale. "My poor nephew had no private enemies: none can know better than you how well beloved he was of all. Even in the height of our broils here he had no personal foes, and though he and I were for a time at variance, yet when the realm settled itself in peace and order we forgot our public differences, and Raoul and Armand became deeply attached the one to the other; is it not so, Armand?"

"It is indeed," said the youth eagerly. "Raoul and I were as brothers, and his loss has been my greatest sorrow."

I could not doubt he spoke truth: his eyes shone as he spoke. Nor could I wonder that his father was incredulous, for Raoul was indeed a man whom it were strange to hate.

"I have a man without who rowed in the self-same galley with Raoul," I said. "With your leave I will send for him, monsieur, and you may verify my story from his own lips."

The Count assented with the same smile of weary tolerance. Within a little Stubbs came to us, looking ill at ease, and twisting his bonnet between his hands

as he stood waiting our pleasure. At my bidding he related the story as I have told it, and rolled back his sleeve to show the letters "R. de T." there branded. His French was uncouth and villainously inexact, yet not so base but that his meaning was clear. The Count questioned him searchingly, almost as an advocate seeks to shake the testimony of a witness; but the man held to his tale in its main parts, answering only "J'ne savons pas"—such was his barbarous form—when the matter in question was beyond his ken.

Having dismissed the man, I asked the Count whether he were not now perfectly convinced of his nephew's fate. He looked upon me with that same smile of pity, and gave me an answer that, I confess, enraged me.

"I felicitate you, monsieur," said he, "on your goodness of heart, but until this moment I was not aware that credulity could be laid to the charge of a man of your nation. I had rather looked upon Englishmen as sceptical, and not easily imposed upon. This man is certainly a liar: you yourself were witness of his confusion. He has played upon your benevolence, and, for myself, I regard it as monstrous that you should have been prevailed upon to make so long a journey for so bootless a reason. Nevertheless it has given me great pleasure to meet and converse with you; and now that you are here, I would beg you to do me the honour to remain my guest for a week at least."

"I thank you, monsieur," I said as civilly as I could, though in truth I was inly raging. "But so far from regarding the seaman as a liar, I do thoroughly believe his story."

"And I too," quoth Armand.

"But, my good friend," said the Count, "see the unlikelihood of it. Suppose that Raoul were indeed in the galleys, it were a simple matter for a man of his rank and condition to purchase his release, and be sure that by this time, and long before this, application would have been made to me for his ransom, the which I need not say would have been instantly dispatched. Is not that reasonable?"

I could not but own that it was, remembering that I had myself used the self-same argument with Sir Walter Raleigh.

"Furthermore," the Count proceeded, "say that I offered a large sum for his ransom, the Spaniards, if they have any reason for holding Raoul a prisoner, would certainly find some one to personate him, and release some knave that fully merits the punishment he suffers. And so you and I should look merely ridiculous."

There was so much reason in what the Count said that I was baffled. His unbelief, I thought, might be in some measure sprung from a reluctance to relinquish the estate he now enjoyed, the which was not to be wondered at: and yet I deemed it unnatural that a kinsman should be more incredulous than a man bound to Raoul by no ties of blood. At a loss how to combat his argu-

ments, I presently took my leave, excusing myself from accepting the invitation he pressed upon me.

I found that Stubbs had been fed by the ancient servitor, and set off with him towards Dieppe. Our horses proved themselves but indifferent steeds in respect of endurance, and we were slow upon the road, so that it was already dark when we reached our hostelry. Being wearied with the journey, as well as exceeding vexed in mind, I was in no mood for aught but a good supper and then bed, and I deferred to acquaint Jean Prévost with my barren errand until the morrow. Stubbs gave me a hard look when I bade him good-night, as though he would fain question me on the present posture of the affair; but I told him nothing, being resolved first to hear what Jean had to say.

I was mighty astonished next afternoon by Jean's manner of receiving my intelligence. Whereas he had been as sure as I myself that Raoul and the galley-slave were one and the same, he now wore a dubious look, and stroked his chin, and declared there was much reason in what the Count had said.

"Raoul is not the only name beginning with R," he said, "nor Torcy with T. Moreover this mariner of yours, you tell me, sought to enter into your good graces by cracking your skull, and is not thereby certified to be an honest man. The manifest friendliness of the Count's son, and the Count's own diligence in seeking his nephew, give no prop to the suspicion I own I entertained, that they were privy to the crime, for the sake of gaining Raoul's inheritance. I am fain to believe that there is dupery, or at least error."

I answered him somewhat hotly that I was no dupe, nor did I believe that Stubbs had erred, and asked whether we could not set on foot a proper inquiry. To this he replied that, France and Spain being at war, such a course must be beset with manifold difficulties.

"Yet," he said, "there is one way. Address yourself to some merchant in Antwerp that hath trading concerns in Cadiz. Such an one, if heedful and discreet, could put your mariner's story to the test, and I doubt not, knowing their love of lucre, there be many good men in Antwerp that would take this task upon them, for a fit recompense."

This counsel seeming good to me, I left him after a little, and instead of returning directly to my lodging, I wended to the harbour, and inquired what vessel sailed thence to Antwerp, and when. 'Twas told me that a trading vessel would leave the port on the morrow, whereupon I counted myself lucky, for none other would depart for a fortnight. I took passage in the vessel for myself and Stubbs, paying good English money, and bespeaking a sufficient quantity of food, more relishable than that which mariners are in general wont to eat.

By the time I came again to the *Belle Etoile* the sun was setting. I entered in, very well content with what I had done, and ran full against Stubbs, who was

lurking within the doorway. He took me by the sleeve and drew me hastily to my room, where, having shut the door, he thrust into my hands some papers, and I perceived that the seals thereof had been broken.

[image]

HE THRUST INTO MY HAND SOME PAPERS

"What is this?" I said in amazement, beholding signs of great trouble in the man's countenance.

"Read, sir, read, and quickly, for the love of God!" he said, and incontinently flung out of the room.

I took up one of the papers to examine it, and saw that it bore the superscription, "To Don Ygnacio de Acosta, at Cadiz." The others were addressed to *grandees* in Seville and elsewhere in the south of Spain. I was still holding them unopened, perplexed about my man's strange excitement, when he came back with the same haste into the room and asked me in a fever whether I had read them.

"Why, no," I said, "I may not read letters that are not addressed to me. What is all this to-do?"

He groaned, and cursed his fate because he was himself unable to read. And then, pouring out his words in a very torrent, he told me that, a little after my departure, there had come to the inn the young man whom he had seen in the *château* Torcy, namely, Armand de Sarney, the Count's son. Old Jacques conducted the youth to his bedchamber: 'twas plain that he was the expected guest for whom the best room had been bespoke. Stubbs perceived that he bore with him a wallet such as are commonly used by gentlemen for holding letters. Having seen his baggage bestowed in the chamber, the youth descended, but without the wallet, and issued forth into the street. Stubbs watched him until he was out of sight, then stole a tip-toe to the room, slit open the wallet, and withdrew its contents, the papers that he had laid in my hands.

"But why?" I asked, staggered by this act of criminal presumption, and thinking the man must be demented.

"Because thickey count be a rare villain, sir," cried Stubbs hoarsely. "I bean't a fule; I kept my eyes upon him when you sat there a-crackin' with him, and if he don't know more'n he ought about thickey young Frenchman, your friend, I'll go to the gallows happy. Read the names, sir, read 'un so that I can hear; quick, for he may be back along."

In a great wonderment I complied.

"Don Antonio de Herrera, Don Miguel de Leon y Buegas; Don Ygnacio de Acosta—"

"There! There!" he cried. "I knew it, be jowned! 'Tis the captain of the galleys, the Don Spaniard that has laid many a stripe on my bare back. Read the letter."

Again he left me in a great hurry, and I guessed now that he was gone to keep a watch against the return of Armand de Sarney.

I was in a quandary. Imprimis, 'twas a dastardly deed to break open the wallet and the seals, and not consonant with plain honesty. Yet I could but acknowledge that a letter writ by the Count de Sarney to the captain of the galleys was a grave cause of suspicion, more especially seeing that the Count had not told me he was acquainted with the Spaniard, as assuredly an innocent man would have done. And so, reflecting that the seal was broken beyond mending, and that my friend's welfare—nay, perchance, his very life—was at stake, I felt it behoved me to satisfy myself on the matter, and do as my Lord Burghley and Sir Francis Walsingham had done when they discovered those devilish plots against the Queen's highness.

Accordingly I spread open the letter addressed to Don Ygnacio de Acosta, and as I read it all compunction died within me, and I fumed with rage. After the customary salutations, this is what I read—

"The bearer of this letter is my only son, Armand de Sarney, whom I commit to your benevolence. Having gained some repute in Paris by his diligence in the study of philosophy and the sciences, above all in medicine, he is desirous of perfecting himself in this last, the which I hold to be both a science and an art, by inquiring into the Moorish system, for which purpose I deem it well, though I am loth to part with him, that he should voyage to Seville, the fame of whose schools has gone out into all the corners of the world. He bears with him letters from good friends in Paris to your most renowned doctors, and to your loving care do I especially commend him.

"I profit by his journey to send you a bill of exchange, drawn on our good friends at Antwerp, and beg that you will pardon my backwardness in that I have withheld it beyond the wonted time.

"The sickness whereof you wrote is now, I trust, wholly passed away, and with all felicitations I subscribe myself your loving cousin,

"HENRI DE SARNEY.

"*Postscriptum.*—I unseal this letter to add that since it was written I have been

visited by an Englishman, who has learnt by the mouth of an escaped slave somewhat concerning a prisoner, who, he affirms, is chained to an oar in one of your galleys. The English are a stubborn and stiff-necked race, and this man has their vices in full measure, being the same that brought to nought the carefully-laid plans of the lamented Monsieur de Lameray. In heat and waywardness he may seek to pick locks and break fetters. Have a care therefore.”

This letter, I say, put me in a fume. Some parts of it I comprehended not, and the whole was composed with great cunning; but I saw clearly enough that the Count de Sarney was well aware of his nephew’s grievous plight, and, furthermore, I suspected that he had had a hand in bringing it about. For a brief space I was so mastered by my wrath as that I was in a manner bereft of my wits; but running my eyes again over the lines, I came on a sudden to a resolution, and none too soon, for Stubbs returned swiftly into the room and told me that the young man in black was at that moment making towards the inn. Thrusting the papers into my doublet, I hastened to the door, and there awaited his coming.

As he was in the act of going past, the passage being dark, I stepped forth and besought him to honour me with his company for a few minutes. His solemn face bore witness to his surprise at seeing me in his own inn, but I caught no trace either of alarm or embarrassment. He came into my room, and, having closed the door upon him, I said—

”It has come to my knowledge, monsieur, that you are about to voyage into Spain.”

”It is true, monsieur, and I rejoice that I shall be able to inquire myself for my poor cousin, though my father scouts your story.”

I read honesty in the lad’s countenance, and grieved that it behoved me to play upon him.

”I have to tell you, monsieur,” I said very gravely, ”that you stand in imminent peril. Your country is at war with Spain. ’Tis believed that monsieur the Count is in treasonable correspondence with the Spanish court. ’Tis known that you are conveying a subsidy to an officer of their navy, and there are charges of even graver import, which in sum bring your father within danger of the extreme penalty.”

The hue of the lad’s face altered to an ashen colour, and he caught his breath.

”It is false, abominably false, monsieur,” he gasped.

”Pray God it be so, monsieur!” said I, pitying him. ”The unhappy fact is that papers of suspicious tenor have been discovered among your baggage, and ’tis only by good luck that I am able to warn you in time. Examine your papers.

You will find that search has been made during your absence, and documents incriminating in character have been abstracted."

Trembling with fear the lad hastened to his own room, and came back in as great a panic as ever I saw.

"It is an error, monsieur," he cried; "my father is no traitor: he can explain. Mon Dieu! what can I do?"

"I will tell you, monsieur," I said. "Be assured that I acquit you of all guilty knowledge. The affair is known only to myself and one other whose silence I can command, and do you but follow my counsel you will be safe. Having fought in the army of Navarre, and being beholden to King Henry, I cannot suffer you to quit France; you will not voyage to Spain. But neither can I proceed over harshly against one so youthful. You were best hasten directly to Paris, and resume your studies there. You will pass me your word not to communicate with your father until I give you leave. He will be in no anxiety concerning you, believing you gone to Seville. But I warn you that if you, directly or indirectly, communicate with him, or with any one whatsoever in Spain, I will not answer for the sea of troubles whereinto both you and he will be plunged. I trust that things are not wholly what they seem, and be sure that none will more greatly rejoice than I if it be proved that the escutcheon of your house is without stain."

"I thank you, monsieur," said the lad brokenly. "I will do your behest in all points, sure, as I am, that time will bear me out."

"Stay," I said, as he made to quit the room; "are you known at the port, monsieur?"

"Nay, I have never travelled by sea," he replied, wondering.

"You are skilled in medicine," I proceeded, "and without doubt can name some authentic treatise wherein one ignorant of the art can gain some inkling of its mysteries."

"Assuredly, monsieur," said he, "there is none to be compared with the great work of Ambrose Parey, the renowned chirurgion of King Henry III. I have it in the original Latin, and shall esteem myself honoured if you will accept it at my hand."

"Right willingly, monsieur," I said, "and though my Latin grows rusty with disuse, yet I doubt not I can make a shift to understand at least one phrase in two."

He departed to his room, returning ere long with a weighty tome with which, I could see, he was loth to part. Having bid each other adieu, he went from me, and since the hour was too late to permit of his riding forth that same night, he dismissed the man that had accompanied him from Torcy, and sought his bed. He rose betimes in the morning, and from my window I saw him ride eastward, leaving his baggage to be dispatched after him by the carrier.

When I had seen him well upon his way I skipped into my clothes, having as yet stood unclad at the window, and made haste to find old Toutain the tailor, whom I knew very well, and who had his shop on one of the quays abutting on what they call the *avant port*. He broke out into ecstasies of delight on seeing me, but I cut him short, and told him in one brief minute what I required of him, which was that within five hours he should rig me in the full apparel of a student of medicine. He protested with great volubility and play of hands that it could not be done, whereupon I told him brutally of our English saying, that "a tailor is but the ninth part of a man," and so stung him into a better mind. In a trice I had chosen the stuff, and Toutain took my measurements, the while he put me through a stiff interrogatory as to my new profession, where I purposed to study, and what not. I leave you to guess what a rack I put my invention upon to satisfy him. Within a bare quarter of an hour afterwards I was back at the *Belle Etoile*, breaking my fast upon a savoury omelet and other comestibles that suit with the French palate better than with ours.

Toutain himself brought me my new raiment half-an-hour before the term, by the which time I had made Stubbs shave off my infant beard and the mustachio that graced my lip. The stout little tailor preened himself like a cock robin when he beheld how becomingly his handiwork sat upon me, and departed gaily clinking the sound English nobles wherewith I paid him.

I had kept close all day, so as the metamorphosis the razor had wrought upon my lineaments should not excite an idle curiosity. At the proper time I sallied forth with Stubbs, he carrying my baggage and the great tome of Ambrose Parey, and made towards the harbour, composing my countenance to that grave solemnity which the disciples of Æsculapius commonly affect. I was taken aback for a moment when I saw Jean Prévost standing in wait at the quay, having come to bid me God-speed. I checked his cry of amazement, and bade him, as he loved me, say nought to a soul of my affairs, whereof I told him no more than that I was sailing to Antwerp, as he had himself advised. Then I went on board, announcing myself as Monsieur Armand de Sarney, and was taken with obsequious respect to the place allotted to me. Stubbs went forward among the crew, and I had no fear of any mischance through him, for a seaman amongst seamen, whatever their nation, is a bird of their own feather.

I observed after a little that the skipper was in a fret, continually pacing the deck and casting troubled glances at the tide. Presently I made bold to accost him, and asked why he tarried. His answer was an unwitting stab to the proper pride of an Englishman, but yet a comfortable testimony to the perfectness of my disguise.

"We wait for a pestilent Englishman, monsieur," he said raspingly, "a slug-gard eater of beef, that will come up when the tide fails and expect us to sail

[image]

I MADE BOLD TO ACCOST HIM

against wind and weather to please his almightiness. And he must needs fill the boat with meat enough for a regiment: our provision is not good enough for him.”

”I would delay for no Englishman alive,” I said, ”and as for his creature comforts, divide them among your mariners: I will see to it that you suffer nought.”

Very soon thereafter he did indeed cast off. I responded with a grave salutation to Jean’s wafture of his bonnet, and sat me down on a coil of rope to digest as well as I might Ambrose Parey his Latin.

We made good passage to Antwerp, where I did not delay to visit the goldsmith upon whom the Count de Sarney’s bill of exchange was drawn. He held me in no suspicion, and was vastly serviceable in negotiating with the skipper of a vessel bound for Cadiz, as well as in conducting the other necessary parts of my business. I was some little troubled in my mind what course to pursue with my mariner. I proposed to him that, seeing the risks of my adventure, he should take ship for London, carrying a letter from me to Sir Walter Raleigh, who I made no doubt would find him employment. But he begged me so earnestly to permit him to accompany me that I yielded, though not without misgiving. I showed him that for a runagate slave to venture himself in Cadiz would be a mere running into the lion’s jaws, to which he answered that, whereas on the galley his head and face were shaved, he was now as shaggy as a bear, and so would not easily be known of any man, slave or free. Furthermore I showed him how in Spain he could not hope to pass either for a Spaniard or a Frenchman, whereupon, with a readiness that raised him in my estimation, he said that he would pass very well for a Muscovite, and invented a fable of his having escaped fifteen years before from the clutches of Ivan the Terrible, and conveyed himself aboard a vessel of Sweden. To this he gave countenance by venting a torrent of outlandish phrases, assuring me ’twas a mingle-mangle of sea terms employed by the Muscovites and the Swedes; whereat I laughed very heartily, and declared that he at least would have been at no loss among the builders of Babel. The matter being thus settled to our mutual contentment, we tarried a few days in Antwerp until the time of our vessel’s sailing, and then embarked together on an adventure whereof neither of us foresaw the end.

III

'Twas a fair bright day when we put into the harbour of Cadiz, and I set foot in that comely town. We took up our lodging in an inn (called *venta* in the Castilian tongue) built all of stone, as indeed are all the buildings, whether large or small. I spent a day in learning my way about the town, or, as Stubbs worded it, taking my bearings, and could not but admire its goodly cathedral and abbey, and its exceeding fine college of the Jesuits. The streets were for the most part so narrow, none being commonly broader than Watling Street in London, as but two men or three at the most together could in any reasonable sort march through them, and I was somewhat astonished to see that the town was altogether without glass, save only the churches. Yet the windows were fair and comely, having grates of iron to them, and large folding leaves of wainscot or the like.

Having attained a reasonable knowledge of the place, I made my way on the second day to the large flat-topped house (as are they all) which I had learnt to be the mansion of Don Ygnacio de Acosta. Before I left Antwerp I had taken pains to seal up the Count de Sarney's epistle (God pardon my duplicity!), and this I presented to a servant of exceeding magnificence at the door; the Spaniards call such majordomo: by whom I was after a tedious waiting conducted to the presence of the Captain of the Galleys. The Spaniards, as all the world knows, have the name for the nicest punctilio and courtliness, but I own that the Captain received me none too graciously. Indeed, his first words, after a briefer greeting than was seemly, were a complaint of the Count's delay in dispatching the draft, the which had occasioned Don Ygnacio to take a loan from a Jew of his town at a usurious rate of interest. I made humble excuses on my father's behalf: you are to remember that I personated Armand de Sarney: and it needed no wondrous shrewdness to discern, by the manner of the Spaniard's putting up the papers in his cabinet, that he was of a right avaricious nature. When he read the postscriptum wherein the Count de Sarney warned him against a meddling Englishman, he seemed to me to resemble a cock ruffling his feathers. He poured scorn upon the Count's fears and alarms, asking me whether Cadiz was Calais or even Cartagena that it lay open to any English adventurer. I might have reminded him how Sir Francis Drake burnt the King's galleys in this very harbour, but I forbore; nor would he have taken any profit of it, for the unquenchable pride and self-sufficiency of the Spaniards after so many buffets and calamities is one of the wonders of the age.

With great condescension Don Ygnacio offered me a lodging in his house until such time as I should pursue my way to Seville, and I guessed that his manner was nicely proportioned to the remote degree of his relationship to my supposed father. Moreover it bespoke no great relish for the company of a mere

student. None the less I thanked him in terms whose warmth would have befitted one that had done me unimaginable honour, but declined his proffered hospitality, saying that even on my travels I diligently pursued my studies, so that I was in no wise suited to the thronging life of the world wherein so high a magnifico moved. His countenance confirmed the justness of my surmise. Then, summoning my gravest look, I said—

"I devote the greater part of my time, señor, to the investigation of the ills that affect the *Ramus stomachichus*, wherewith I have perceived, even in the so little time I have sojourned in your town, that many of its inhabitants are afflicted. My father bade me inquire very particularly after your health, the which by your last advice was not all that could be wished. I fear that the *Ramus stomachichus* is the seat of your disorder, and I trust that the treatment of your physician is meeting with the desired success."

I threw this out as a bait, and to my exceeding joy I saw that it was swallowed as greedily as a gudgeon snaps up a worm. Don Ygnacio was a mountainous man, as Stubbs had told me on the voyage, with the girth but not the hardness of an oak, his face like dough with two raisins for eyes, his whole frame betokening a consuming love of the flesh-pots and strong liquors. During my speech, delivered with a measured gravity, his face put on a look of great dolefulness, and broke out into a sweat.

"I cannot sleep," said he, in most dolorous accents.

"A certain sign," said I, nodding my head gravely.

"I dream of horrors," said he.

"Devils, and serpents, dark dens and caves, sepulchres, and dead corpses," said I, quoting the words of Ambrose Parey, which I had diligently conned on board ship, "all arising from the putrefaction and inflammation of the *Ramus stomachichus*, together with the afflux of noisome humours to the brain. The diaphragm hath a close community with that organ, by the nerves of the sixth conjugation which are carried in the stomach."

"I reel in the street," said he, with lamentable groans, "and when I lay my head on the pillow, I hear noises like the sound of many waters."

I shook my head solemnly, having at the moment no more of Ambrose Parey's sentences at my command. Taking him delicately by the wrist, I put my finger on his pulse, which in truth fluttered unsteadily.

"Show me your tongue," I said, and could barely avoid laughing at the grimace he made when he displayed that monstrous organ.

Then, presuming on his manifest discomposure, I dealt him a lusty buffet above the fifth rib, so that he caught at his breath, and at his outcry I inquired solicitously whether he felt any pain.

"The pains of Gehenna," he said, groaning.

I was mute, bending on him a mournful look, whereat his excitation of mind did but increase.

"I pray you, cousin, be open with me," he said. "I will steel my heart to bear it."

"Your case is not utterly hopeless," I replied with deliberation, having first hemmed and hawed in the style approved of the faculty, "but it demands careful treatment. Methinks from the symptoms that it has hitherto been treated somewhat negligently. I will return to my lodging and ponder upon it, consulting Fernelius, his *Pathologia*" (a work I had seen named in the pages of Ambrose Parey). "To-morrow, by your good leave, I will see you again. The true course is not to be lightly determined, but I trust that my art has resources wherewith to counter the worst symptoms of your distemper and perchance to work a cure."

"Do so, good cousin," he said. "Come early, I pray you, and by St. Iago, I shall know how to recompense you becomingly."

I took my leave, and when the door was between us, gave a loose to my merriment, hastily composing my features when the majordomo approached to conduct me to the street.

I returned to my inn, and buried my nose for some while in the folio; then betook myself to an apothecary's, where I purchased a quantity of barley creams, poppy seeds, and seeds of lettuce, purslain, and sorrel, commanding him to make a decoction of them and have it ready against I came on the morrow. This was a prescription of Ambrose Parey. I bade him also compound an admixture of the infusion of sundry simples, exceeding nauseous, yet like to do no great hurt, to wit, valerian, quassia, a trifling quantity of colocynthis (which grows very plentifully in Spain), and *pix atra*, by the which you shall understand common tar. This also, a bolus of my own devising, I commanded the man to have in readiness, and then found that I had a good relish for my dinner.

[image]

I BETOOK MYSELF TO AN APOTHECARY'S

Stubbs had already shown me where the king's galleys lay; 'twas off the east side of the town, betwixt the island and the mainland. They were four in number: these were the principal galleys, there being sixteen of an inferior sort that rode nigh to the bulwark of *St. Philip*, at the north-east extremity of the town. A strong fortification of stone-work ran from this bulwark towards the water-side, having its southern end beside the king's storehouse of provision and munition for his ships of war. Here, moreover, was the barrack in which

certain of the galley-slaves were cabined at night, for when the galleys lay idle the greater number of the oarsmen was employed on shore in sundry laborious exercises—repairing the fortifications and the like. A little way southward of this barrack was a rampire of earth built close against the sea-wall, and furnished with three great pieces of ordnance. This kind of bulwark is called in military parlance a *terrapleno*. There was in the inner harbour also a fleet of near forty merchant vessels, making ready for the American voyage, and a goodly number of galleons and galliasses for the intended invasion of Ireland.

I marvelled greatly at the bravado of my companion as we passed through the marketplace, thronged with folk of all conditions—orange-sellers, horse-dealers, chapmen and hucksters innumerable—and came near to the barrack wherein he had spent many hours in anguish both of body and mind. He showed me the two portions of the building, and the window of the very room where he had lain. He showed me also a mighty fine galley lying in a manner of dock near to the king's storehouse, and on my asking a wayfarer what the vessel did there, he told me 'twas the galley of Don Ygnacio de Acosta being new furbished and fitted for sea. A great way off I saw some of the slaves, with shaven polls, and naked save for a strip of cloth about their loins, moving hither and thither about their labour, under guard of soldiers armed with halberds and arquebuses. A hot fire of wrath raged within me when I thought that my bosom friend perchance toiled among them, but I gave great heed so as that I should not approach them too nearly, lest he might spy me and by some gesture ruin the plan I had conceived for his salvation.

As we were returning to our inn from this inquisition, by way of the market-place, I observed that many curious glances were cast upon us, and being in some dubience how to account for this, I was at first ready to fear that some suspicion was entertained of me and my purposes, or else that some person had recognized my companion despite his shaggy locks and beard. But on a sudden the true explication smote upon my slumbering wits, and I took myself to task for my heedlessness. Stubbs was attired in the common garb of sailor men, and I perceived that it must indeed seem passing strange to the Spaniards, of all people the stiffest on decorum and punctilio, to see a grave student of medicine in familiar converse with a man so meanly habited. No sooner did this illumination flash upon my mind than I bid Stubbs leave me, giving him at the same time money wherewith to buy him a Spanish gaberdine, which would in some sort cloak his quality. I went on to my inn alone, pondering upon how prone men are, when devising machinations of great poise and moment, to omit some small trifling matter, which lacking, all their cunning is like to turn to futility.

Sallying forth of the inn about three of the clock, I went to my apothecary's, and took from him the vials containing the preparations he had compounded for

me, together with a small Turkey sponge and a new medicine glass nicely graduated. These I gave into the hands of Stubbs, now clad in a capacious gaberdine that suited with his quality as my henchman, and bade him follow me at a reasonable interval. At the door of Don Ygnacio's house I received them from him again, and being admitted as before by the don's gentleman-usher, I found my grandee awaiting me in a quivering expectancy. His heavy countenance lightened at sight of me, and he told me with plentiful groaning that he had not shut an eye all the night through, but tossed wakeful and tormented upon his bed. I felt of his pulse and scanned his furred and sickly tongue, and then, mustering all my new-gotten lore, I discoursed very learnedly for the space of five minutes upon the distempers of the *Ramus stomachichus*, ending my allocution somewhat as follows—

"Having now full assurance, señor, as well by the observation of my senses as also by your own description, that this is in good sooth the distemper whereof you suffer, I must tell you in all sobriety that 'tis high time 'twere taken in hand ere it grow beyond remedy. My counsel is that you instantly command the attendance of a skilful surgeon."

"Ods my soul!" he cried (for so I render his words in our homely English), "I have employed surgeons without number, and they bleed me, both of blood and money. Do you undertake me, good cousin; but do not let my blood, I pray you, for I am not a whit better for all the gallons they have drawn from my exhausted veins."

I affected to shrink from the conduct of so serious a case, on the score of my youth and pupillary condition, and of the high nobility of his captainship; but the more backward I showed myself, so much the more instancy did he employ; in brief, he would take no denial. Whereupon I insisted that he must follow my directions without reck or hesitation, the which he avowed himself ready to do in all points. Accordingly I stripped the wrappings from my vials, and poured from the larger of them into the medicine glass, with the nicest measurement, a good dram of the villainous admixture, and called for water to allay it, and this I added with deliberate care, he keeping a wary watch on all my movements. I then bade him drink it at a draught, the which he did, afterwards spluttering and wrying his countenance to such a picture of abhorrence as came nigh to upset my studied gravity.

"Ay de mi! ay de mi!" he groaned; "'tis a very vile draught, cousin, a very villainous concoction. Must I discomfit my inwards with the whole bottle?"

"Thrice a day, señor, you must take your dose," I said.

"Permit me at least to qualify the savour of it: it is so exceeding nasty and rough upon the tongue," he said pleadingly.

"One sole glass of sherris," said I, with a great show of reluctance; "no more,

or the merits of this most potent medicine will be utterly quelled.”

He drank the wine with great relish, eyeing the decanter very wistfully as I set it out of his reach. Then calling for a basin, I poured into it a little of the contents of my second vial, and dipping the sponge into the liquid, I delicately anointed his sweating brows, telling him ’twas a sure begetter of sleep tranquil as a child’s.

”Your hand is rather that of a swordsman than of a physician, cousin,” he said, thereby giving me a wrench in my soul, lest he began to suspect me. But he proceeded: ”Yet it is delicate in its touch as a woman’s; you give me great comfort, cousin.”

I continued to bathe his temples until I had wrought him to a fair placidity; then admonishing him to be punctual in taking his doses of the former admixture, I left him, promising to visit him again on the morrow.

My next concern was to certify myself that Raoul was still among the galley-slaves, and whether he was of those that remained aboard or of those that were employed ashore. To this end I dispatched Stubbs to the sea-wall in the afternoon, a little before the time when, as he had told me, the day’s work was wont to end, there to keep a watch. He returned soon after sunset, and told me that he had seen his whilom comrade among those that were marched into the barracks. I inquired eagerly how he looked, and my heart was very bitter when he replied that my friend was worn to a shadow, with lamentable sunken cheeks and haggard eyes. Nevertheless I rejoiced that he was yet alive, and comforted with this assurance I bent my mind to the working out of the plan I had devised for his deliverance.

On the morrow I went somewhat earlier to see my patient, whom I found wondrously gracious, for that he had slept a good four hours without waking. Indeed, he believed himself to be already cured, and I had much ado to persuade him to take his dose. I showed him that his distemper being of long standing, it was sheer madness to suppose that it could be wholly banished in so short a space of time, and proceeded to expound the necessity of continuing not only in the course he had begun, but also in a subsidiary treatment which I would forthwith explain.

Don Ygnacio, as I have said, was of enormous bulk, and the ills from which he suffered, when they were not merely figments of a disordered imagination, proceeded from too instant a devotion to meat and drink and an over-softness of living. In a word, his greatest need was temperance in these things, together with a more frequent use of his muscles. Accordingly I made him strip to his shirt and stand in his stocking feet in the middle of the room, and then put him through such simple exercises as the Dutch captains use with the common soldiers—extensions of the arms, bending of the trunk, and so forth. It was matter

for merriment to see the great hulks, at my urging, make desperate endeavour to touch his toes, and come not within half a yard of accomplishing it. I kept him at these motions, paying no heed to his protestations, for a good half-hour, by the which time I had wrought him to a fine heat and perspiration, so that when finally I permitted him to sink back upon the cushions of his divan he was more wholesomely tired, I warrant, than he had been ever in his life before. While he sat and fanned himself, and quaffed slowly the cup of sherris I allowed for his refreshment, I made him a neat discourse for which I was beholden not to Master Ambrose Parey, but to my own wit. 'Twas sound sense as well as a furtherance of my device.

"You must know, señor," I said, "that this distemper of yours never assails men of spare frames and active bodies. The husbandman, the mariner, the poor scavenger of the street never suffer in this wise, nor is their *Ramus stomachichus* ever in peril of dissolution. In truth, their bodily exercise does but strengthen the nerves in all their conjugations, so that their inward parts perform their offices to perfection, and furthermore furnish to them in some sort an armour against the assaults of disease. For a speaking ensample you have the slaves of your galleys, those reprobates whom you have in your august charge. Did ever you know one of them to suffer from any derangement of the *Ramus stomachichus*?"

Since I conjectured Don Ygnacio's knowledge of the anatomy of man to be less than my own, and that was infinitely little, I got the answer that I expected, with the addition that if any galley-slave should have the impudency to suffer from a gentleman's complaint, he would certainly be cured by the bastinado.

"Now therefore," I continued, here drawing largely upon my invention, for a purpose, as you are to see—"now therefore, it is one of the miracles of our nature that a man beset by this dreadful distemper, being set in juxtaposition with a man of exceeding spareness, but otherwise sound in his members and organs, the infirmity of the one is in a manner fortified by the wholeness of the other, or as Spegelius hath it in his renowned tractate, the debility of the one is engrafted and mingled with the virtue of the other. The trial of this remedy is attended with sundry notable perils and incommodities, wherefore it is not to be lightly undertaken, and I leave it for this present until we have made a proper experimentum of the more vulgar means."

The captain heard this with great attention, and made me many compliments on the profundity of my learning, though he might have read Spegelius his tractate from cover to cover without finding the passage that I gave forth with so great unction. Leaving the precious seed to germinate, I betook myself away in high contentment, though not without a qualm and tremor at the lengths whereto my audacity was carrying me.

Having sought my faithful attendant, I dispatched him to make sundry pur-

chases at the armourers of the town, a knife at one, a dagger at another, small weapons in goodly number, but not more than one weapon at any one shop, lest suspicion or curiosity should be excited. These weapons, when he brought them to the inn, I bade him enfold them in strips of cloth I held in readiness, and wrap them in two several parcels. While this was adoin, I took my way to the sea-wall, noting very particularly the positions of the four galleys, the extent of water betwixt them and the shore, the manner in which the shore curved to a point, and all other information that was necessary to the execution of my plan. As I walked hither and thither, I was observed by a captain of soldiers that chanced, as it seemed, to be taking the air by the sea-wall, and who accosted me, asking me with a kind of truculency what I did there.

"Noble excellency," I replied, "I am but a poor student of medicine of the French nation, making a brief sojourn in this your town."

"A Frenchman, and I warrant me a spy!" he cried, and hailing a soldier from the guard-house near by, he assured me that I should soon company with rats and beetles in the castle dungeon.

"Beseech you, señor," I said, "my illustrious cousin Don Ygnacio de Acosta, captain of the royal galleys, will have somewhat to say to that. Come with me straightway to his house, and we shall learn if such immodesty of language pleases him."

My bold and assured mien daunted this strutting fellow, and he began incontinently to make excuse how that he wot not of my condition, and craved my pardon for the unmannerliness whereinto he had been betrayed. I took him very coldly, and set forth to return to my inn. This is a slight matter, unworthy of mention but for that which ensued.

That same evening, a little before the hour when the slaves were wont to be immured in their barrack, I came to the door of Don Ygnacio's house and inquired of the majordomo how the worshipful captain did.

"Desperately sick, señor," he replied. "He has but now commanded me to summon hither Don Diaz de Rotta, physician to the constable of the castle."

"Is the messenger gone forth?" I demanded, in no little perturbation, for the presence of a true physician was like not only to undo all my stratagems, but also to stand me in a pretty hobble. Hearing that the lackey was even then donning his outdoor livery (for among the Spaniards punctilio rules over high and low alike), I bade him stay the man until I should have seen his excellency.

When I entered to him I was amazed beyond measure to see his pitiful condition. He lay back on his divan, uttering most dismal groans, his countenance of a deathly pallor, and his eyes astare as with the very fear of death. He thrust out a feeble arm when he saw me, and cried in a faint voice—

"Out of my sight, rascal! You have killed me with your vile nostrums."

[image]

"OUT OF MY SIGHT, RAPSCALLION!"

My terror and amazement were little less than his own, for I knew my drugs to be harmless, albeit nauseous, and I could not come at any reasonable explanation of his distemperature.

I inquired of the majordomo, who had followed me into the room, the time when this alteration had manifested itself, and his answer removed all my apprehensions that Don Ygnacio was in imminent peril of dissolution. He had eaten a very hearty dinner soon after I left him, and fallen asleep, but was awakened by a violent commotion in his inward parts, and had been, to put it in plain English, as sick as a dog. It was told me afterwards by my good friend and physician Sir Miles Ruddall that my drugs themselves would not have wrought so mightily upon him but for the unwonted exercise whereto he had been enforced, and his monstrous gluttony thereafter. Having a shrewd suspicion that this was all that ailed him, I made him drink a cup of sherris mingled with cognac, and spoke soothingly to him, resolving with a stubborn hardness of heart to turn his incapacity to my own purposes. I upbraided him, mildly, yet with earnestness, for that his imprudence had well-nigh undone all my cure, and avouched that it was high time to attempt the experimentum I had formerly suggested.

"I am very sure," said I, "that there will be found among your galley-slaves a man of the right degree of leanness to accommodate your excellency, and I will instantly command your coach to attend you, so that we may go down to their place and make trial of this sovereign remedy without delay."

The strong liquors had already revived him, and his face was recovering its proper ruddiness. Likewise his spirit took on its natural hue, the proof whereof was his exceeding fierce outcry.

"Ods my valiancy!" he cried, "shall I join skins with a rascal, I, hidalgo of Spain? Never will I permit such scum to approach my person."

"Truly, señor," said I, "it is impossible to conceive a gentleman of your exalted rank coming within a span's-length of a mean rascal, but I opine that there are among the slaves some of reputable condition, perchance some English prisoners, or Flemings, only they are in general of a brawny lustiness that suiteth not with the experimentum."

"Why, so there is, now you put me in mind of it," he said with a brightened eye. "There is a Frenchman, a notorious reprobate, but that is nothing against his rank, which is but little less than my own. And for leanness a rake could hardly

match him; his leanness is not far short of transparency.”

”That is right good hap,” said I, raging inwardly that he should speak thus of my friend, for I made no doubt it was he. After fortifying him with more wine, I linked my arm with his, and took him slowly to his coach, and when we had mounted into it, gave the word to the driver to convey us to the barrack. We halted for a brief space at the inn, and I brought out my henchman, carrying the two parcels which, as I told Don Ygnacio, held things needful for our trial. I bade Stubbs perch himself beside the driver, and we went on.

We had to pass on our way the small dock wherein the captain’s galley lay, and here I let fall a word of admiration of the fine lines of the vessel, asking very innocently whether it were one of the royal galleys of his charge.

”It is my own vessel,” he said with much complacency, and then nothing would content him but I must instantly go with him and see the vessel more closely. It was plain he held it in high esteem, and since I had a reason of my own for desiring a nearer acquaintance with it, I yielded to his wish in the manner of one humouring a sick person. He was by this time, in truth, so nearly returned to his wonted state that I began to fear lest he should declare the experiment of transfusion unnecessary. I accompanied him aboard the vessel, where he showed me the place for the crew, and those for the rowers and the soldiers, and his own place, very richly caparisoned; also the piles of arms and some barrels of gunpowder. Having admired the galley and all its appurtenances with great fluency of utterance, I entreated him to proceed to the barrack, advising him that the day was already far spent, and it were best to accomplish our purpose before the chill of night descended on us. And so we came to the barrack.

IV

Notwithstanding, or maybe by reason of, the marvellous good hap that had attended all my devices up to this present time, I was aware of a flutter of disquietude about my heart as I followed Don Ygnacio into the building. What I purposed doing must needs be done very quickly, and one untoward accident might very well prick the bladder of my imposture and wreath a noose about my neck. I had laid my plans as warily as I might, and now all stood upon my composure, the degree of brazen-facedness I could muster, and the degree to which the Spaniard could be gulled.

We came first, having entered the passage, to the guard-room, where some dozen soldiers were assembled, casting the dice and taking their ease. The door

of a room adjacent to it stood open, and there my eyes lit upon the captain that had accosted me by the sea-wall, who, when he beheld me, rose up from his seat with trepidation, believing without doubt that I had brought his general to punish him. I paid not the least heed to him, and he made haste at Don Ygnacio's bidding to go to the hall beyond, where the galley-slaves were confined, and bring forth the Frenchman.

When he was gone I asked Don Ygnacio whether there were not some private room where we might do our business, since it was not seemly that we should be at the gaze of so many goggling eyes while the experimentum was a-doing. He led me to a small ante-chamber some few steps along the passage towards the hall, Stubbs remaining with his parcels at the door of the guard-room, perfectly at ease, though he stood within arm's-length of the men that had formerly oppressed him. Presently I heard a clanking of chains, and the captain returned, bringing with him a lean and lanky scarecrow of a man, naked save for his loin-cloth, his poll and face being shaven clean. It smote me to the heart to see in his hollow eyes and sunken cheeks the altered lineaments of my dear friend, erstwhile comely and jocund as any you would see. He lifted his eyes as he came in, and regarded Don Ygnacio with a look of gall, not turning his gaze upon me.

"A sorry knave," said the Spaniard to me. "Think you, cousin, there is enough virtue in him for our business?"

"We can but try, excellency," I said, and at the words Raoul shivered and looked at me with such amazement that I feared lest an unlucky word should betray me. I dealt upon him a sudden and meaning frown, the which escaped the observation of the others, they having eyes for the slave alone. To my exceeding joy he had the wit to take me, and cast down his eyes in the manner of one that hath no more hold upon the world. Then I turned to Don Ygnacio and said:

"He hath a wild look, señor. It were meet that we have two soldiers here with us, so that we may make our trial in comfort and security."

"Certes," he replied, "we have already Captain Badillo; we will have a man from the guard-room."

"By your pardon, señor," I said, "the señor captain did me the honour to affront me a while ago, and his presence at this time will so trouble the conjugations of the nerves, the which needs must be in perfect tranquillity, as to imperil the good success of our undertaking."

"It was a lamentable error, excellency," stammered the captain. "I wot not that the worthy physician was akin to your excellency."

"Go, sirrah," said Don Ygnacio sternly. "Who affronts my kin affronts me. Send hither two men from the guard-room."

I was never better pleased in my life than when the captain departed, for the

two common ignorant soldiers would be much less like to suspect me. Thereupon I called to Stubbs to bring in the parcels, and when he came, a little behind the soldiers, I shut the door, bade him undo one of his bundles, and said gravely that all would soon be ready for the experimentum.

Stubbs loosed the ropes and laid them, in the manner of a careful servant, beside the bundle. From this when it was unrolled he took first three strips of a dark cloth, about an ell long, which he laid over his arm. Then he brought forth a small roll of white canvas and gave it to me. I motioned him to withdraw to a little distance, as also the soldiers; then I made Raoul stand a few paces from Don Ygnacio, facing him. Posting myself betwixt the two, I drew from my pocket a small box of powder of chalk, and unrolled the canvas, yet so that the Spaniard might not see its inner side, and with solemn circumstance I dusted it with the powder. This done, I stretched it out between my arms, and making two strides towards Raoul I bade him look intently thereupon while I counted ten. I heard Don Ygnacio breathing hard behind me as I gravely told the numbers one by one, and when Raoul informed me with his eyes that he had read the words I had carefully imprinted on the canvas (they were: "Grip the Spaniard by the neck whenas I give the sign") I rolled up the canvas and stepped slowly backward, beckoning with the one hand Don Ygnacio, with the other Stubbs and the soldiers, to draw near.

You are now to observe that Raoul and Don Ygnacio were within a hand-breadth of each other, that one of the soldiers was close to me, and the second beside Stubbs. All was silent. On a sudden I let forth, very sharply but without raising my voice, the one word "Now!" Instantly Raoul was at Don Ygnacio's throat; I closed with my soldier and held him in a strangling embrace; and Stubbs, with the neatness of a skilled hand, dealt his man a blow that stretched him senseless on the floor. Quick as thought he handed to us two of the cloths that he had upon his arm, and we clapped them into the mouths of our prisoners, he doing the like with the third. So sudden were our motions that there had been not the least opportunity of resisting us, and though Don Ygnacio offered to cry out before the gag was comfortably settled between his teeth, Raoul bade him in a fierce whisper be silent or his life was forfeit. It was short work to truss them with the ropes, thanks to Stubbs his deftness, and I knew with infinite gladness of heart that the first part of my device was accomplished.

[image]

INSTANTLY RAOUL WAS AT DON YGNACIO'S THROAT

There was still much to do, and our peril was but beginning. In two words I acquainted Raoul with my plan. I asked him how many soldiers were on guard among the galley-slaves; he told me four, and every one had a key to the padlocks wherewith they were fettered to the wall. My design was to set free the slaves, seize upon the Captain-General's galley, the which he had so obligingly shown me, and put to sea. It was necessary to our success that the soldiers in the guard-room should be silenced, and also the Captain Badillo, if he was yet at hand; but since we could not hope, being but three, to overcome a dozen men, we must perforce first set free the slaves, by whose assistance the feat might be easily compassed. Moreover, there was great need for haste, Stubbs having told me that it was drawing near the time when the cookmen were wont to bring in the slaves' supper from the outhouses.

I opened the door stealthily, and peered along the passage to the guard-room. There was none in sight, but neither was there so much noise proceeding from the room as I should have liked. Nevertheless, since our case was desperate and would not abide long rumination, we durst not stay for the nice weighing of chances, but had to act at once. I had had the soldiers brought into the room for a purpose, namely, that we might dress ourselves in their garments and so gain some covert for our device. I bade Stubbs strip the two soldiers of their gaberdines, and these we donned, he and I, and then proceeded with all quietness along the passage to the slaves' hall, Raoul being carried betwixt us, so that the clanking of his chains might not draw the soldiers forth of the guard-room.

Coming to the door of the hall we set Raoul down, and thrust him before us into the room, entering close behind him. I saw in a quick glance the miserable slaves lying in a long row by the wall, and four soldiers conversing in a group about the middle of the room. The dusk of evening forbade them to perceive at once that the two supposed soldiers that had entered were not their comrades, and when at our approach they were certified thereof they had not the time to collect their wits, for Stubbs, by a little the foremost, smote one of them a dint that sent him headlong against the wall, and then immediately grappled with another. Meanwhile Raoul and I had not been idle, each dealing with his man, and in a few moments we had all four at our feet, begging for mercy.

This had not passed without some noise, but having been careful to shut the stout oaken door behind me I had a reasonable hope that the sound would not have penetrated to the guard-room. The clamour that might have been feared from the slaves did not arise, so great was their consternation. I asked Raoul to acquaint them with our design, whiles that with Stubbs' aid I stripped the soldiers of their outer garments and their arms, and trussed and gagged them as we had done afore with the others.

Raoul told the men that all who could muster their courage had a good

chance of escape, but they must in all points obey me, a countryman of the great Dragon (so Sir Francis Drake was commonly known among them), who had come to their succour, and had already made a prisoner of Don Ygnacio. He promised them hard work, and maybe their fill of fighting, and adjured every man that had no stomach for it to remain in his fetters rather than irk the rest. Then we went swiftly from one to another, unlocking their chains with the keys we had taken from the soldiers. Never a man of them elected to remain, and though Raoul was for leaving certain of them that he knew to be poor-spirited, I deemed it best to release them all, lest those that were left should raise an uproar and so bring us into danger.

We arrayed four of the stoutest of them in the garments we had taken from the soldiers, covering their shaven heads with the morions that hung on pegs to the wall. Then with these four and four others, Raoul remaining in the hall, we ran swiftly down the passage to the guard-room, burst open the door, and by the vehemency of our onset overthrew the soldiers there in marvellous brief time. Stubbs and myself we set to a-trussing the fellows, but the slaves contemned such delicate work, and gave quietus to their whilom oppressors with such weapons as came first to hand.

While we were in the midst of this hurly-burly, on a sudden lifting of my eyes I saw Captain Badillo standing in the door betwixt the guard-room and his own apartment, and gazing at us in the manner of one bereft of his wits. I left trussing my fellow and sprang towards the captain, whom I caught by the scruff of his neck, and, showing him my dagger, bade him hold his peace on peril of his life. At that same conjuncture some one cried that the cookmen were crossing the outer court, bearing hugeous baskets of biscuit and great two-handed caldrons of meagre broth, as they were wont to do at this time. Extremity, I must believe, sharpens a man's wits, for in the twinkling of an eye I thrust the captain into the passage and towards the outer door, straitly charging him to bid the men carry their burdens to the Captain-General's galley, since he had taken a sudden purpose to go a cruise. I had Spanish enough, to be sure, to give the command myself, but I knew it would come with authority from Captain Badillo, whereas from me, a stranger, it might be slighted. My naked dagger was sufficient enforcement of my bidding, and in a trice I saw with satisfaction the cookmen change their course and stagger with their loads to the quayside. By this means I obtained for the slaves a modest dole of food, whereof I doubted not they stood in need.

[image]

SHOWING HIM MY DAGGER, I BADE HIM HOLD HIS PEACE

Hasting back to the slaves' hall, I found that Raoul had ranged them all in readiness for departure. I had bidden Stubbs see to it that the slaves in the guard-room should don as much as they could of the soldiers' garments and cover their bald pates with their morions, and bring also the weapons from his bundles, and then, myself going at the head, holding Captain Badillo by the sleeve, we marched out and made our way as swiftly as we might without sign of hurry to where the galley awaited us. There was a sentry at the gate of the munition-house some two-score paces distant, but the dusk in some sort enshrouded us, and certain it is we came to the galley without molestation or so much as a cry.

But there a peril that I had not foreseen lay in wait for us. The cookmen, having bestowed their burdens aboard, stood carelessly on the quay to witness our embarkation. A dozen of the slaves had shipped themselves before these men were aware of aught amiss; but then one spied the villainous countenance of a notorious desperado beneath a soldier's morion, and communicating his discovery to his fellows, they with one consent took to their heels and fled towards their quarters with hue and cry. Sundry of them were felled by the slaves whom they encountered, but the rest got themselves clear away, and it was plain that ere long the alarm would be sounded in every part of the town. I cast Captain Badillo into the galley, and urged the rest of the men to quicken their speed, and they came helter-skelter, falling one over another in their haste.

Now it seemed that all were aboard, but I had not observed Stubbs among them, and began to fear lest he had been intercepted. But I then perceived him, and three of the galley-slaves, staggering towards me with a heavy burden which as they drew near I discerned to be none other than the mountainous bulk of Don Ygnacio de Acosta. I cried to them to hasten their steps, the which they did, and arriving at the quayside they let their load fall with no more tenderness than if it had been a bale of merchandise, and the Captain-General fell with a monstrous thwack upon the galley's deck.

At Raoul's bidding the men had already gotten out the sweeps. But at this the eleventh hour I observed a pile of sails lying over against the sea-wall, and I commanded Stubbs and those with him to bring them to the galley. The men who were aboard, in their haste to depart, had slipped the moorings, and could hardly be restrained from pushing off without us. I heard Raoul upbraid them with great vehemency, and ask them how they supposed they could escape with oars alone, whereupon they left their striving and gave us time to tumble the sails in among them. Then the rest of us leapt aboard, I last of all, and the slaves, thrusting their oars with desperate violence against the quay-wall, drove the rocking vessel out into the basin.

It was high time, for already there was stir and hubbub not a great way from the quay, and at the very moment when we sheered off a shot was fired,

I doubt not by the sentry at the munition-house. Through the gathering dusk I saw a concourse of folk swarm upon the sea-wall and the quay, there being not a few soldiers among them. But all things had been done so suddenly as that none but the sentry had had time to kindle his match, and the galley was come forth out of the dock ere they arrived at the quay. Shouting and cursing they ran hither and thither, in a perfect medley and confusion, there being as yet none to direct them what they should do. I could not forbear making them a most courteous salutation with my hat, though I fear the darkness and their fury forbade them to mark the exceeding grace of it.

Turning to observe how things were ordered, I perceived that Raoul, whose knowledge of the harbour was the fruit of long and bitter travail, had established himself at the helm. I descended to the lower deck, where Stubbs had put himself over the oarsmen, who were set in their due ranks, and tugged at the sweeps with a vigour wherewith they had never laboured before, I warrant you. In sooth, Stubbs was constrained to bid them moderate their ardour, inasmuch as there lay a reef of rocks on the starboard side, and it would go hard with us if we by any ill-hap ran upon them. But the resolute and assured look upon their faces, villainous and forbidding as the most part were, confirmed me in my belief that, barring any untoward accident, we should in no long time be beyond reach of pursuers.

The harbour of Cadiz, you are to understand, hath a northward trend to the mouth of the river Guadaloto, whence the coast of the mainland runs north-westerly until we come to the mouth of the Guadalquivir. Four galleys, as I have said, were at anchor nigh the munition-house, and at the bulwark of Saint Philip at the north-east extremity of the island lay other sixteen. The first four we had already passed, but we must run the gauntlet of the sixteen, the which when we should have done we had nought to fear save perchance from the ordnance established on the coast of the bay of Caleta. I knew right well that notwithstanding the clamour that filled the town, where alarm bells were dinning amain, some time must needs be consumed before the occasion of the pother was thoroughly known, and the galleys could be put in fair trim to pursue us. So indeed the event answered to my expectation, for we came pretty near to the mouth of the harbour without anything whatsoever happening to mar our security.

It was now dark, yet not so black but that we could see our course, and besides there were the lights of the town to serve our helmsman as guide posts. That the town was mightily astir was demonstrated by a shot that was belched out upon us by one of the great pieces mounted on the bulwark of Saint Philip. But it did us no harm, unless some slight defacement of our figurehead that I observed next day was the work of this shot. Taking warning, Raoul steered the vessel hard over against the mainland, though I deplored the loss of time we

suffered thereby. Indeed, but for this circuit which we made, and which, being a prudent measure, I could not gainsay, verily I believe we should have run out into the open sea without any let or hindrance whatsoever. But it happened that as we again bore westward, I perceived the black shape of a galley move from its anchorage in our wake, and presently after other of the same sort. This gave me no manner of apprehension, for we were fully manned, and our men, rowing for their very lives, were not like to be outdone by the hapless slaves in our pursuers, even though they were urged by the whip.

We were in another case when, as we came abreast of the point at the northern extremity of the bay of Caleta, a galley shot forth by the skirts of the rocks and made great speed to sea, not directly towards us, but taking a slantwise course with intent to head us off, as seamen say. It was a hard matter in the darkness to make a nice reckoning, yet I thought we should outstrip even this the most threatening of our pursuers. Being ware of a steady fair breeze off the land, I deemed it mere foolishness to neglect it; accordingly I bade Stubbs choose some few men among the oarsmen that were mariners, and send them on deck to bend the sails. This proceeding caused us to lose way somewhat, the sails having been cast aboard without any care, and so needing time to order them rightly. And when I saw that the captain of the galley in chase of us had foregone me, and being now come into the wind had already gotten his sails ahoist, I was not a little dismayed. Bethinking me of Don Ygnacio and Captain Badillo, hitherto mere idle passengers and burdensome, I resolved to put them to the oars, not without a secret relish in the thought that they would now taste of the toil they had heretofore inflicted upon the slaves. With my own hands therefore I cast Don Ygnacio loose, and bundled both him and the lesser captain to the lower part of the vessel, giving them into the charge of my good Stubbs, with a strait injunction that he should urge them to a decent industry. I did not see with my own eyes how they accommodated themselves to their task, because I returned to the deck to look to the sails and also to keep a watch on the enemy. But Stubbs told me afterwards that he plied the whip right merrily on the backs of those two proud Spaniards, and so wrought them to a just activity, to the great delectation of the galley-slaves, who themselves rowed with the more cheerfulness, beholding their tormentors dealt with after the manner they delighted in.

[image]

HE PLIED THE WHIP RIGHT MERRILY

When our sails took the wind, the speed of the galley sensibly increased,

but it was not long before I was troubled to see that our pursuer was gaining on us. She had far outstripped her consorts, the which indeed were no longer visible, and might be left out of the reckoning. The darkness was waxing deeper, and I could scarce have seen our resolute pursuer had we not come opposite to the extreme westward point of the island, where, before the friary of Saint Sebastian, a great fire had been kindled, without doubt of set purpose to enfurthor the chase. It was the customary place where beacon fires were made, to give warning of danger on the side of the sea. The ruddy glare, shining forth over the water, showed me that the galley was no more than two furlongs astern. We made all the speed we might, but I could not but perceive that the pursuer crept ever nearer, and I began to be exceeding apprehensive. Her oarsmen, having rowed not above a quarter of the distance we had come, must needs be fresh by comparison with my own men, who had been straining at the oar without remission for close upon an hour. Furthermore, she would certainly have soldiers aboard her, maybe to the number of fifty or more, and we had no sufficiency of arms wherewith to oppose them.

We had come beyond the cast of the beacon fire, into a vast impenetrable blackness. Pacing the deck in sore travail of spirit, and setting my wits on the rack if haply I might devise some stratagem that should profit us, on a sudden I spied by the fore hatch a large vessel of iron shaped like a round bucket, and pierced with holes, which I knew was designed to hold fire, whether for cooking or for illumination. I stood for a while chewing upon a device which the sight of this vessel had set a-working in my mind, and then hied me to Raoul to make him partner of the merry conceit I had fashioned. He heard it joyfully, and I went without delay to put it in practice.

I gathered together some shreds of canvas and rope ends and stuffed them lightly into the vessel, mixing them plentifully with grease that was employed about the rowlocks, and liquid tar out of pots left in the galley by the men that had been caulking her. Then I thrust two short pikes through the topmost holes of the vessel opposite one to the other, as it were at the cardinal points of the circumference, and stopped the others as well as I could. This done I strewed upon the top a handful of gunpowder, and set in the midst a length of slow match that might be two or three minutes in burning. Having kindled the match at its utmost end, I let down the vessel over the stern into the water, and with great satisfaction watched it float in our wake until nought was visible in the darkness save the red glow of the match. Then I ran below and bade Stubbs put the rowers to a very frenzy of labour, so that we might draw as far as we could from the pursuer while that their strength endured.

Returning to the deck I beheld my beacon burst into a bright flare; and the pursuer coming upon it, I saw the galley with great clearness, and sparkling

reflections from the morions and harness of the soldiers that were aboard. I knew that so long as the light endured our own galley must be wholly hid from their eyes, and besides, they would be perplexed to know the meaning of the light, and might even suppose it to betoken a floating mine whereof they must be ware. Without doubt it would delay them somewhat, and give me the few minutes I needed for the full accomplishment of my design.

As soon as I saw the galley come within the circle of light I gave the word to Raoul, who put up the helm, so that our vessel swung round in a wide circuit until she was a cable length of her former course. I had already commanded the slaves to cease from rowing, lest the sound of their oars should acquaint the enemy with our movement. As we came round I saw the galley draw out from the radiance, and heard the voices of the men upon her. She sped directly forward, following the course her captain supposed us to have taken.

When she was almost abreast of us, and scarce three fathom length away, I bade the rowers pull with all their might, and Raoul steered straight for the galley. The rattle of the oars must have apprised the enemy that we were nearer than they supposed, but they were not thoroughly aware of us until we were upon them. Then, as they spied our vessel looming big out of the darkness, there was a great outcry among them, and it appeared that divers commands were given, for one moment she seemed to be swinging round to oppose the imminent shock, the next she held on her course as if endeavouring to evade us. By her greater speed she might without difficulty have drawn clear, but in bearing up she lost way, and so enabled us to diminish the gap between her and our galley.

Under the sturdy strokes of our oarsmen the galley in a manner leapt towards her. We were greeted with a pretty hot salvo from her musketeers, but there were no more than two or three of us upon the deck, and we were flat on our faces, all save Raoul, so that what with the sway and toss of the vessels and the flurried aim they took, we suffered no hurt. While the smoke still hung in the air there was a mighty crash: the bow of our galley had cut the other a little abaft of the mainmast. Being fashioned for this very device of ramming, our beak had, I doubted not, stove a hole in her side, whereas I could not suppose that we had been endamaged, though the vessel quivered from stem to stern.

Immediately after we struck I commanded the oarsmen to back water, by which means, and the cunning handling of the helm, we withdrew a space. From the enemy's galley came loud shouts of fear and consternation, and I heard some say that she was sinking. It troubled me that, to save our own skins, we had perforce imperilled the lives of three-score hapless slaves that had done us no wrong, but were indeed in a like case with our own men; but the breeze brought with it the rattle of the oars of the galleys that had first set off to pursue us, and I could very well leave the men of the foundering vessel to be rescued by their

fellows. Our need was to draw clear away as swiftly as we might. Accordingly I commanded our men again to ply their oars, and this they did the more willingly, despite their fatigue, because they exulted in the crippling of their adversaries.

We were now come into the open sea. Our men pulled with measured strokes for a full half-hour before I deemed it prudent to suffer any intermission. Then I bade them lie upon their oars while I hearkened for sounds of our pursuers. There was not so much as a whisper. I could not but believe that the commanders of the galleys had given over the attempt to come up with us. Yet, as I took counsel with Raoul, I durst not rest thoroughly assured that all danger was past, nor all need for labour and watchfulness vanished. The galleons in the harbour would surely make sail as soon as they could be put in trim, and scour the sea for leagues around. Furthermore, we might fall in with some vessel homeward bound, or perchance outward bound from Lisbon to the Americas. It behoved us then to be very wary, and, as our proverb says, not to holla until we were out of the wood.

Our men, having fasted since the morning and toiled very hard, were in dire need of food, and I hazarded to rest for so long as they might take their fill of the broth and biscuit which the cookmen had brought aboard, bidding them spare enough for another meal. We should not be utterly safe until we made a French port, Bordeaux being the most likely, and we were distant thence, at the very least reckoning, upwards of three hundred leagues. Within a single day we must needs be in dire straits for food, but I had conceived a plan for supplying ourselves so soon as we were free from the immediate fear of pursuit.

When we had all eaten and drunk very heartily, though in good sooth the fare was of the poorest, we sped on again, the men taking turns to row, and so continued all that night. We directed our course at a venture, but at break of day we saw with thankfulness that we were not a great way from the shore. There was no safety for us but in boldness; accordingly Raoul steered directly for the land, that was very barren hereabout, and we put into a small bay, and ran the vessel abeach, purposing to lie up there and take our rest. I parted the whole company into watches, and we slept by turns, the men of each watch being straitly charged not to stray from the low beach to higher ground. While we stayed in that place I saw several galleys and one great galleon cruising in the offing, which I guessed to be hunting for us; but we were very well hid, and I thought it would scarce come into the heads of the Spaniards that we had adventured ourselves ashore.

During one of the watches I talked long with Raoul concerning the occasion of my venturing upon this course for his behoof. He was in perfect ignorance of the complicity of the Count de Sarney in his kidnapping, and was loath to believe that his uncle could have descended to such a depth of villainy. I was at no pains

to bring him to my own persuasion, being content to leave the unravelling of the plot until we should come safely to his home. He drew from me the full tale of my adventures, breaking into a great gust of laughter when I related the manner of my dealing with Don Ygnacio. I assured him that he owed all to my honest mariner William Stubbs, on whom he bestowed thanks without stint, promising me in secret that, if we got safe to Torcy, he would reward him with much more than barren words.

We lay in that spot for near six hours, and then, having consumed all our food, saw ourselves faced by the prospect of famine. Certain of the galley-slaves, who were for the most part desperate and abandoned ruffians that richly deserved their fate, began to murmur, and not without reason, for it is no profit to a man to leap out of the frying-pan into the fire. In this strait I bethought me of the use whereto I had imagined putting our noble prisoners, Don Ygnacio and Captain Badillo. We launched our galley when the tide was full, and mounting into her, coasted along for a league or two until we descried a village of fishers nestling in a hollow between the cliffs. We then ran ashore, and made Don Ygnacio write on his tables a formal requisition for meat and wine, signing it with his full name and titles. And I went up the land with Stubbs and Captain Badillo, together with a dozen of the galley-slaves bearing baskets and buckets; and giving the captain to know that I would certainly use my dagger upon him if he by word, deed, or even with wink of eye betrayed us, we marched boldly to the village, where he presented his mandate to the people, and received from them enough to supply our instant needs. When I saw how grudgingly they furnished us, I pitied the poor folk, and wished with all my heart that I could pay them, suspecting that the minions of the Spanish king were not over scrupulous in honouring this sort of debt; but my purse was well-nigh empty, and I could only trust that Providence would in due season repay them a hundredfold.

The story we gave out was that the Captain-General of the King's galleys was making a voyage to inspect the coast, and we found this served us to a miracle among the ignorant fisher folk, both at this place and at the many other villages on the coast of Portugal where we made like perquisitions on the days succeeding. We pursued our way every night, and rested every day, choosing only small paltry places whereat to obtain food, and such as we might adventure into without raising a wind of suspicion. Nowhere did we come within an ace of danger save at one village, whose parish priest, a canon of Salamanca, would not be stayed from paying a visit of ceremony to the illustrious and worshipful Captain-General. It was a marvellous whimsical thing to behold their meeting, the priest offering gracious incense of flattery to the royal officer, who received his compliments and felicitations, I being at his elbow, in a mood betwixt dudgeon and impotent rage. I caught a look of puzzlement on the worthy canon's

face as he made his adieu, and I fear me he carried to his humble parsonage a blighted estimate of the courtliness of princes' servants. As for me, I thanked my stars that the peril of discovery had as it were but lightly brushed us.

Our plan of hugging the coast, yet not so close as to risk our bottom on rocks or shoals, kept us far away from the track of sea-going vessels, and the weather being exceedingly fair, we accomplished fifteen or twenty leagues a day without danger from the elements or man. The voyage was tedious beyond telling, but I did not grudge it, for joy at beholding the amelioration it wrought in the health of my dear friend. I laughed often to think how the transfusion I had proposed in trickery to Don Ygnacio was in process of accomplishment by the agency of nature. He became leaner in proportion as Raoul indued flesh, and my scrupulous care that he should not have the means to overeat, but should perform a fitting share of labour at the oar, did not only reduce his bulk, but also brought his body to a healthful condition whereto he had been strange for many a year. He showed me no gratitude, and paid me no fees, though I declare without boasting that I did more for him than any physician or chirurgeon that ever mixed a powder or wielded a scalpel.

I used my endeavour to wrest from him a full confession of his villainies, but he would never admit further than what we knew: that he had received moneys from his cousin the Count de Sarney. As for the kidnapping, he avouched most solemnly that he was as ignorant as innocent in respect of it; but inasmuch as Raoul had acquainted him of his name and condition, and besought him with many promises to set him free, I concluded that he had found his best interest in playing the horse-leech upon his cousin.

We came in due time to Bordeaux, where our story, when it leaked out, became a nine-days' wonder. I am very sure it would have mightily pleased the Sieur Michel de Montaigne, had he been yet alive; of whose Essays I purchased a very pretty copy before I departed. We sold the galley at a price much above its value, to a rich noble of Perigord, who declared his intention of keeping it for his private pleasure, and for a perpetual memorial of the gullibility of Spaniards. Every galley-slave received his freedom and his proper share of the purchase money, though I confess I was uneasy in my mind when I thought of such rapsallions being loosed among honest people. We delivered Don Ygnacio and Captain Badillo to the mayor, who threw them into prison until he should advise himself concerning their future. Then one fair day I took ship with Raoul and worthy Stubbs in a vessel bound for Calais, being somewhat in pocket by my adventure.

V

In the interim between our departure from Cadiz and our arrival at Calais, Raoul's hairs grew again both on his face and on his head, albeit I observed with sorrow a many flecks of grey among them. Besides those and sundry scars and callosities, there was no other enduring mark upon him of his long torture in the galleys when he came ashore with me. We stayed in Calais only so long as that he might provide himself with decent apparel, and then we rode on hired horses, Stubbs following, to Dieppe. There we betook ourselves to Jean Prévost, to learn what had happened during the two months of my absence. He welcomed Raoul with boisterous demonstrations of delight, and having heard our story, cried out in a fury that he would drive his sword through the carcass of the Count de Sarny, and so rid the world of a villain. But I prevailed upon him to leave us to our own courses with the Count, whereupon he told us that the Count had but lately sold his own little domain, the which we took to be an evident sign of his perfect security.

Next day we rode all four to Torcy, and never did I see pleasure so admirably pictured on a man's countenance as it was when the old faithful servitor opened to us and beheld his true master. He lifted up his old cracked voice and called to his fellows, and they came pell-mell from the kitchen and offices, and leapt and laughed in the right Gallic manner, which we sober Englishmen are apt to find ridiculous. Their clamour drew the Count from his cabinet, and he stood at the head of the stairs as still as a stone, his countenance taking the colour of wax when he beheld Raoul at my side, and Stubbs capering (sore against his will) in the arms of a buxom buttery maid. The miserable wretch wreathed his lips to a smile, and said, mumbling in dreadful sort—

"Welcome, my dear nephew; I had given you up for dead."

"You have kept my house warm for me, monsieur," said Raoul, with a fine self-mastery; but Jean Prévost sprang up the stairs, and taking the Count by the collar, bundled him down and out at the door without ceremony. Raoul dispatched a man after him with his hat and cloak, and he went away and sought shelter, as we afterward learnt, in the house of one of his old retainers.

We made diligent search in the cabinet for evidence of his villainy, finding nought save a book of accounts wherein were set down the sums he had paid to Don Ygnacio de Acosta, the addition of which mounted to a monstrous figure. Raoul bade his servants gather up all the Count's chattels ready to be conveyed to him, and having put all things in order for his own occupancy he returned with us to Dieppe, where we spent a merry night at Jean Prévost's house.

We did not delay to seek the king's commissary, before whom we laid the

whole matter. He took down our depositions, and examined the account-book, and delivered his opinion at great length, the which was, in brief, that we had nothing to convict the Count of the felony of kidnapping, though we might reasonably presume it; but that Raoul might bring a suit against him in the king's court for restitution of the moneys he had disbursed. This he did, and I had word, many months after, that the slow-footed law upheld his claim, and that the Count, being unable to acquit himself of so heavy a debt, was reduced to beggary and thrown into prison, there to remain at the king's pleasure. With great magnanimity Raoul relented towards him for the sake of his son Armand, whom he sought out in Paris, and, being perfectly assured of his innocency, endowed him with a pension sufficient to keep his father in a decent penury.

As for me, long ere this was accomplished I had returned with Stubbs (rejoicing in Raoul's liberal largess, and bound to my service for ever) to my own land. I was not wholly at ease in my mind, for I had absented myself from my duty in the Queen's Guard without her august leave, and had no expectation but that she would visit my fault upon me somewhat grievously. I betook me to the Palace on the day after my return, and learnt from my comrades that the Queen had been highly incensed against me, and had sworn to show me bitter marks of her anger.

I took up my post in the corridor at the proper hour, and had been there but a brief while, when her Highness herself issued from her cabinet unattended. She halted at sight of me, and, frowning heavily, cried in shrill and shrewish accents (and it went to my heart that she was now most apparently an old woman)—

"How now, sirrah? Dost dare show thy ugly face to me?"

"As for my ugliness, madam," said I, "that is as God pleases."

"It does not please me that thou hast hog's bristles on thy countenance" (my beard and mustachio, in truth, were as yet somewhat like a field of stubble). "Where hast thou been, monkey?"

I told her Grace that I had come from working some mischief among the galleys of her brother of Spain, whereupon she let forth a round oath, exceeding disparaging to the said brother, and bid me go with her into her chamber and inform her more particularly on that matter. I related the incidents in their due order, and when I came to that part where I had made the Captain-General swallow my vile admixture, she burst forth in a fit of laughter so immoderate that I feared lest, tight-laced as she was, she should do herself a hurt.

"Well, well, I pardon thee, my sweet Chris," she said, when I had made an end; "but I must e'en have my moiety of the spoils."

And 'tis sober truth that her Grace made me tell over into her royal palm a half of the French crowns that I had brought back with me. I confess 'twas not an exact reckoning, for knowing her Grace's propensity, I had been careful to make

a subtraction from the full sum before I named it, a fault which I trust will be held to be venial, and not laid against me by honest men.

Her Grace's anger being thus mollified, I made bold to proffer a petition whereon I set much store, to wit, that she would suffer me to join myself to Sir Walter Raleigh for his voyage, the ships being at that time, as I had already learnt, on the point of sailing from Plymouth.

"Ods my bodikins!" cried the Queen; "hast thou lost thy silly heart to some Spanish slut, that thou art burning to return among the garlic-eaters?"

"I assure your Highness' Grace," said I, "that in all my wanderings I have never beheld a damsel whose eyes could lure me from devotion to my Queen."

At this her Grace showed as much pleasure as she were a girl of sixteen, and I looked for her to consent to my petition; but in this I was deceived.

"Well, well," she said, "thou'rt a proper bold rascal, but I can't have all my lovers running about the wicked world, in danger of falling into divers snares and temptations. No; ods my life, thou shan't go," she cried in a passion, "and if I see any mumping and glooming, to the Tower with thee!"

I smiled as amiably as I could, and vowed that I had no pleasure save her Highness' will; but I own that I nourish to this day a remnant grudge against my old mistress, for that she hindered me from serving with Sir Walter in that world-renowned enterprise.

[image]

tailpiece to Fourth Part

Interim

That feat of Sir Walter Raleigh was a wondrous achievement that any man might envy without blame. The English fleet came to anchor off Cadiz on June 20, 1596. Sir Walter's voice had great weight with the generals, and it was by his counsel and ordering that the enterprise was ruled. His device was to attack the galleons lying there in the haven and after assail the town, and so was it performed. Himself led the van ward in the *Warspright*, and ran through a fierce cannonade from the fort of Puntal and the galleys, esteeming them but as wasps in respect of the powerfulness of the others, and making no answer save by blare of trumpet to

each discharge. And he dropped anchor close over against the *St. Philip* and the *St. Andrew*, the greatest of all the galleons, and the same which had overpowered in the Azores the little *Revenge* wherein Sir Richard Grenville died gloriously, winning deathless fame. Three hours the *Warspright* fought those great ships, and was near sinking; nevertheless Raleigh would not yield precedence to my Lord Essex or the Lord Admiral, but thrust himself athwart the channel, so as he was sure none should out-start him again for that day.

And so he set on to grapple the *St. Philip*, and the Spaniards fell into a panic, and that galleon with three others tried to run aground, tumbling into the sea soldiers in heaps, so thick as if coals had been poured out of a sack. Straightway two were taken or ever their captains were able to turn them; but the *St. Philip* was blown up by her captain, and a multitude of men were drowned or scorched with the flames. And Raleigh received in the leg from a spent shot a grievous wound, interlaced and deformed with splinters.

Thereupon my Lord Essex hasted to land, and put to rout eight hundred horse that stood against him, and by eight of the clock the English were masters of the market-place, the forts, and the whole town save only the castle, which held out till break of day. And the citizens were constrained to pay a hundred and twenty thousand crowns for their ransom, and moreover all the rich merchandise of the town fell to the English as spoils of war. And Sir Walter's valiant deeds purchased again the favour of the Queen, and she willed he should come to the Palace, and received him graciously, holding much private talk and riding abroad with him.

My grandfather, who was of a goodly presence, had taken the eye of the Queen, and she lifted him out of the Guard and made him one of her fifty gentlemen pensioners, albeit he was full young for such a place. These gentlemen were appointed to attend the Queen on all ceremonious occasions, bearing a gilt axe upon a staff, and to serve about the Palace, the which offices were little to his liking. And his father dying about this time, he went down into Hampshire to take up his inheritance, and was much busied about his estates, and exercising as justice of the peace that little law he had learned in the Inner Temple. But he was again lodging in London when my Lord Essex, having botched up his work in Ireland, and taking reproof like a spoilt child, gave rein to his ill-temper, and hatched treason against his long-suffering Mistress. My grandfather often spoke to me sorrowfully of that headstrong young lord, and related sundry of his fool-hardy doings—how he locked into an inner chamber the Chancellor, the Chief Justice, and other grave men who had resorted to his house to inquire the cause of the assemblage of armed men there; how he rode boisterously through the streets, brandishing his sword, and calling upon the populace to follow him; and how finally he lost his head on the block.

A short while thereafter, my grandfather sailed to Ireland, where befell him the last great adventure, and, as he was wont to say, the most fortunate, of his life. The O'Neill, called Earl of Tyrone, had been long time a thorn in the side of Queen Elizabeth, taking gold from the King of Spain to sustain his treasons, and in the year 1597 making open war upon the English governor. He did great despite upon the people of the Plantation, and lurking in the forests, long defied the English soldiery. My Lord Mountjoy, whom the Queen had sent to Ireland as her deputy in the room of Essex, being resolved to make an end of the rebellion, ravaged and wasted the country, driving off the cattle, starving the people, and fortifying all the passes through the woods. And you shall read now how my grandfather once more, and for the last time, drew his sword, and the strange fashion whereby he was led to put it up again, for ever.

THE FIFTH PART

CHRISTOPHER RUDD'S ADVENTURE IN IRELAND, AND THE MANNER OF HIS WINNING A WIFE

[image]

headpiece to Fifth Part

I

I hold it ill that a man should be under no constraint to labour for his bread. To have a competency is indeed a comfortable thing; but being so possessed, a man lacks a spur to high emprise, and his faculties are like to wither and decay.

It was my fortune to receive from my father a property sufficient to supply the needs of the body; and the gear I added thereto in divers enterprises and adventures gave me the wherewithal to maintain a decent port before the world, and even at the Court of the Queen's Majesty, where a man had need be of some

substance. But my ambition did not soar a high pitch: I was content to play a modest part on the world's stage; and when I fell out of humour, as sometimes I did, with the fevered life at Court, I withdrew myself to my little estate in the country, and there lived rustically among the boors and the pigs.

Nevertheless, from having seen many men and cities in my time, I was not long of finding this rustical employment stale upon me. After some few months I would begin to yearn again for the stir and bustle of London, where I might at the least whet my wits that had grown dull and rusty among my simple country fellows. One such time, in the late autumn of the year 1601, my years then numbering thirty, I rode out of Hampshire to London, and took up my lodging in King Street, in Westminster, rejoicing to meet my old friends again, to hear the clash of wits, and feed my mind on the marvellous inventions of Will Shakespeare and Ben Jonson and other ornaments and luminaries of that glorious age.

I found that two great matters were in men's mouths, whereof the one was the exceeding melancholy whereinto the Queen had sunk since the beheading of my Lord Essex; the other, the rising of the O'Neill (otherwise the Earl of Tyrone) in Ireland, and the descent of some thousands of Spaniards upon the harbour of Kinsale to enurther that base ungrateful traitor. King Philip having failed in his endeavour to get a grip upon the throat of England, was seeking to annoy her extremities, like as a blister upon the heel or a corn upon the toe. I acknowledge that this news of his impudency made me itch and sweat to flesh my sword again on those enemies of my country; but I dallied somewhat, supposing that my Lord Mountjoy, who was now Lord Deputy in my Lord Essex his room, would speedily make his account with the Irish rebels and their Spanish consorts. Furthermore, Ireland had always shown me a forbidding aspect: I had heard much of its wildness, its thick woods and filthy bogs, its savage and uncouth people, from men that had served the Queen there and got thereby small thanks and less renown; and I had read of these matters also in the book of Master Spenser, whereof a written copy (for it was not put in print until many years after) had come into my hands. For these reasons, therefore, I was no ways in the mind to adventure myself across the Irish Sea.

But that winter, a day or two before Christmas, Sir Oliver St. John arrived in London out of that distressful country, bearing letters from the Lord Deputy and his council wherein they set down the exceeding hard straits in which they rested for want of provisions and men. They related how they had annoyed all parts of the town of Kinsale with the battery of their ordnance, so as the breach was almost assaultable, insomuch that they were not without hope of the enemy yielding, or of their being able to enter the town by force. But a thousand more Spaniards had lately sailed into Castlehaven with great store of munition and artillery; and moreover the Spanish commander had besought the O'Neill to

haste to relieve him, who had accordingly come and encamped not far from the town with eight thousand men or more. The Lord Deputy therefore earnestly entreated the Lords of the Council in England to despatch to him without delay four thousand good footmen at the least, with victuals, munition, and money.

These urgent messages occasioned a notable stir among the Lords of the Council, and being laid before the Queen by master secretary Cecil, kindled her to an extremity of rage. Her Majesty had already been at great charges to sustain the Lord Deputy in his dealings with the rebels and their Spanish aids, and being ever loth to untie her purse-strings, she bemoaned exceedingly the ruinous expense which this demand of the Lord Mountjoy would cast upon her. Yet had she a proud spirit that ill brooked the thought of Spain planting a foot in any part whatsoever of her dominions, and she was torn betwixt her parsimony and her care for the common weal.

It chanced that, having gone to Greenwich, where the Queen then was, to bear my part in the revels that were performed at Christmas-time, I came in the eye of Her Majesty one day as she passed through the hall. She stayed her walk (alas! how tottering!), and as I rose up from bending my knee, my heart smote me to see how thin and frail her body was, albeit her eye still flashed and glittered with the fire of her unquenchable spirit.

"So, sirrah," quoth she, "you are come again out of your pigsty to refresh your snout with more delectable odours."

Her Majesty was ever hard of tongue, and she bore me a grudge for that I had demitted the humble office I had one time held at her Court.

"Madam," I said, "I have come like Eurydice, out of Tartarus into the bounteous light of the sun."

"Ods fish! dost think to win me by thy flattery?" she said; nevertheless methought she was not ill-pleased. But she went on, in a pitiful shrill voice: "What does a proper man here in idlesse, conning soft speeches and inditing silly verses to silly wenches, when my kingdom of Ireland lieth in peril for lack of swords! Go to, rascal; an thou wouldst pleasure me, show thyself a man, and vex me not with lip service and the antics of an ape."

Then, wellnigh breaking in two with her churchyard cough, she passed on, leaving me a sorry spectacle of confusion.

Methought that now I could do no other thing than take up the challenge which my wrathful Mistress had flung at me. In two breaths she had called me swine and ape, and I grudged that in this her feeble old age she should hold me in low esteem. 'Twas too plain that she was not long for this world, and the desire to please her, together with my old longing for a bout with the Spaniards, prevailed upon me to join myself to those voluntaries that were proffering their service in Ireland. Accordingly I wrote a brief epistle to her Majesty, acquainting

her of my design, and received for answer two lines in a quivering hand.

”Chris, thou’rt a good lad. God bless thee with perseverance. Thy loving sovereign, E.R.”

II

In such manner it came to pass that, one day about the middle of January, I found myself sailing into Kinsale harbour, my ship having aboard her many gentlemen that were voluntaries like myself, and some portion of the new levies for which the Lord Deputy had made petition. I stretched my ears for the sound of guns and the blast of war trumpets, but there was a great stillness and peace that smote me with dread of ill news. However, on coming to land, I discovered as much with disappointment as with joy that the Spaniards had yielded themselves by articles of capitulation a few days before, that the O’Neill had been beaten back from the English camp with sore discomfiture, and his men scattered to the four winds. Though I rejoiced in the good success of the Lord Deputy’s arms, I was vexed that I had come too late to deal a blow against the Spaniard, more especially as I foresaw a weary campaign against the native rebels.

It fell out according to my expectation. The Lord Deputy, furnished with new supplies of men and munition, marched through the land, burning, wasting, harrowing without ruth, and hanging such chief rebels as fell into his hands. As it ever is in war, they that suffered most were the poor peasantry of the country: and seeing daily their lamentable estate, finding everywhere men dead of famine, insomuch that in one day’s journey we saw upwards of a thousand men lying unburied, my heart sickened of this work, and I thought to return home. Could I but have looked into the future, I should have seen divers sorry experiences through which it was my destiny to pass; but that which is to come is mercifully hid from us. I foresaw neither what I was to suffer, nor that great blessing which Providence bestowed on me, whereby I have ever regarded my going to Ireland as the most fortunate and happy event of all that ever befell me.

That island is covered in every part with thick forest and vast swamps and bogs, from which arise exhalations exceeding noisome as well to the native people as to our English. From camping oft on the borders of such oozy fens I took an Irish ague, suffering sharp pains in all my limbs, with shivering and vomiting, my teeth chattering, my head oppressed with ringing noises intolerable. So sore was I beset by this most malignant distemper as that all my strength departed from me; I could neither sit my horse nor march afoot, and was afflicted with so

desperate a languor and exhaustion that I believed myself nigh unto death. Being in so dreadful a case, I must needs be left behind in a small fort, that had lately been constructed to command a ford on the border of O'Neill's country; and I am sure that when my companions shook my hand and bade me farewell, none expected ever to see me in life again. But by the mercy of God and the devotion of my servant (there was no physician in that place) I recovered of my fever; and within ten days or so I felt myself ready to make a push towards the army that had gone before.

We had learnt by scourers that our people were then distant some thirty miles across the hills, intending to advance further towards the north. By this it was plain that I must needs hasten if I would come up with them, and there was the more reason for this in that the hills were known to be the haunt and covert of rebels. But I had good hope that, being furnished with a noble horse, and accompanied with my stout and mettlesome servant, and three tall natives of the country, of proven loyalty, I might compass the journey of thirty miles in security. I acknowledge that, having been occupied of late in hunting a broken rabble, I held the enemy in lighter esteem than I ought; and when I look back upon the matter, I feel some scorn of my recklessness, and deem that in what befell me I had no more than my desert.

We set forth at daybreak one morning, one of the Irishmen leading us, and took our way into the hills. I knew somewhat of the trials and hardships of travel in Ireland, but they were as nought by comparison with that which I encountered that day. The country was covered with close and almost impassable woods, intersected with watercourses of depth sufficient to render hazardous their crossing; and we pierced the woods but to find ourselves in swamp or morass. I was by this time aware of the treacherous nature of these quaggy places; but in spite of all our heedfulness, and notwithstanding that three of us were natives well skilled in their country's discommodities, we had oftentimes much ado to hold our course. Ever and anon we saw ourselves forced to go round about; and although our guide ordered our going with as diligent carefulness as he might, many times we had need to quit our saddles and lend aid to our horses, to draw them from the deceitful mire of the swamps, in such sort that we made but poor going, and by the middle part of the day had accomplished a mere trifle of our journey.

As we were picking our steps thus gingerly over an expanse of spongy ground, overhung by a low beetling cliff, there befell an accident upon which I cannot look back without a mortifying pang, seeing that I was, for all my thirty years, a veteran in war. In all our journey up to that moment we had seen neither man nor any living thing save only the small animals of the woods, and some few wild cattle that smelt us afar off, and vanished from our sight more quickly than eye could follow. On a sudden, before we were aware, there descended upon

us from the midst of the bushes on the rock aforesaid a thick shower of spears and stones. A fragment of rock smote upon my headpiece with such violence as wellnigh to stun me; and my horse, made frantic by the sudden onset and the fierce cries of the men in ambush, swerved from the narrow track whereon we were riding, and carried me into the swamp. Dizzy with the shock, I lost my manage of the beast, which, plunging to regain his footing, cast me headlong from my saddle.

When I came to myself, I saw my horse in the hands of two kernes, as they are named in that country—rude and ragged fellows, barefoot, half-naked, and armed with light darts and a long and deadly knife which they call a skene. These two were hauling upon my horse's bridle, to bring the scrambling beast upon the dry ground. One of my Irishmen lay like a senseless log, with a dart in his body; another and my servant were overthrown, and the kernes were standing over them; the third Irishman, as I saw, had wheeled his horse, and was spurring along the track, I supposed to bring help. I made no doubt but that the rascals, when they had finished their work upon my followers, would deal likewise with me, whom they had left hitherto, seeing me dazed and bewildered by my fall.

But I perceived, after a brief space, that these ragged and unkempt creatures took no step towards me, but stood at gaze, their fierce eyes glittering with I knew not what excitation of mind. I was still in my wonderment, bracing myself to withstand the assault which I supposed they intended against me, when I came to a sudden knowledge of my true situation. I lay upon a thin crust of earth overlying the yielding bog, and already I felt it sinking under my weight. I had not been so short a time in the country but I knew in what extremity of peril I lay, and this knowledge serving as a goad to my numbness, I strove to lift myself from the clammy embrace of the bog that was beginning to suck me down.

And now my mind was smitten with the fear of death, and I take no shame from the terror that beset me. A man may face his foes, and not quail, with a weapon in his hand; but to lie helpless in the clutch of an enemy against which neither weapon nor courage is of any avail is a condition to turn the stoutest heart to water. I cried aloud to those kernes that stood upon the bank, choosing rather to die swiftly by their knives than to choke and smother in that slow torment. They did but mock me with jeers and horrid execrations, uttered in their barbarous tongue,[#] and their delight became doubly manifest when with every motion of my ineffectual limbs I did but assist the bog. The more desperately I strove to free myself, the more closely did the pitiless morass cling about me and clog me, like to that loathly creature of which mariners tell, that winds innumerable tentacles about its living prey and digests it to a jelly. Presently I could no more move my limbs, and when I sought to purchase succour from those that stood by, offering great rewards whereby every one of those paupers might have

become a petty Croesus among his kind, they sat them down like spectators at a play, to feast their eyes upon my agony, even as in ancient days the Romans saw without compassion the holy martyrs yield up their lives beneath the claws of Nubian lions. And when I saw that neither promises nor entreaties would prevail with them, by reason mayhap that they knew not what I said, I wrapped myself in despair and silence, endeavouring, as a Christian ought, to contemplate the inevitable end with quiet mind.

[#] It must be remembered that Englishmen of Christopher Rudd's time were ignorant of the Irish civilization and literature which their ancestors had destroyed, and were even more apt than their descendants to decry what they did not understand.—H.S.

[image]

*THEY DID BUT MOCK ME WITH JEERS AND HORRID EXECRA-
TIONS*

I had sunk wellnigh to my shoulder-blades, and as it were a mist was hovering before my eyes, when the sound of a horse galloping awoke my slumbering senses, and I looked up, thinking to see my Irishman returning. The kernes had risen to their feet, and turned their backs upon me, and their vociferous clamour fell to a great silence. And gazing beyond them, I saw, not my Irishman, but a young maiden, upon a hobby of the country, riding with loose rein at the very brink of the cliff above. Distraught and speechless, I gazed in amaze and wonderment, as this radiant creature brought her hobby to a stand on the height over against me. She cast one glance at me, and I heard a voice like a silver bell rung sharply, and at her words the kernes were set in motion as they were puppets moved by invisible strings, and with one consent, yet sullenly, they hastened to obey her behests. Having loosed the bridles of my servant's horse and of the maiden's hobby, they knit them together, and one of the men cast this rope of leather upon the bog towards me. Mustering my remnant strength I caught it, and passed it over my head and beneath my armpits, whereupon some few of the kernes laid hold of it at the end, and with mighty hauling heaved me from my slimy bed. So strong was the embrace wherein I had been clasped that I came to the bank in my stocking feet, having left my boots in that ravenous maw.

In this sorry plight my aspect was as filthy and foul as Odysseus when he

showed himself to the maiden Nausicaa. My Nausicaa smiled upon viewing me, and when I could find no words wherewith to utter the gratitude of my swelling spirit, her lips parted, and that silvery voice uttered words in my own tongue, which fell the more sweetly upon my ear by reason of their quaintness of accent.

"I am troubled, sir," said she, "at this your incommodity, but no herald announced your coming, whereby we might furnish guides. Haply your messenger went astray?"

I perceived that she mocked me, but being too far spent to answer her in kind, I was content to relate briefly what had befallen me. She smiled again, and said lightly—

"My kernes did what seemed good to them, at no man's bidding. I pray you accept our hospitality, so that we can repair in some measure the coldness of your welcome in this our country."

Then she turned upon the kernes that stood glooming by, and spake a few words to them in their own tongue; and after she had assured me that they would do me no harm, and bid me accompany them, she sped back towards the quarter whence she had come, riding without bridle, a marvel to behold.

III

I would fain have had further speech with the damsel, to know more fully what was intended towards me; 'twas plain that she was of much consideration with these ragged ruffians, with whom her lightest word was law; and in truth I wondered not at their tame submission, for though her age was, as I guessed, not above twenty years, she had a most commanding and imperial mien, and a manner of speech that enforced obedience.

Having set me upon my horse, and likewise upon his my Irishman that was wounded, my servant and the other Irishman being compelled to remain afoot, the kernes led us along the path over the hillside, one of them bearing my pistol, another my sword, which he had taken from my belt. Thus as we marched, my mind was busy with these late accidents, and with my fair saviour, whose hair methought was of the hue of red gold, and her eyes of an incomparable blue. From such meditation I shook myself, to take note, as beseemed one in my case, of the nature of the country we were traversing. I perceived that the track, very rugged and narrow, wound steeply up the hillside, giving but few glimpses of any prospect. But on a sudden, coming to the summit, I beheld a very fair and delightful landscape, that put me in mind of the country in Devon. Betwixt the

hill whereon I stood, and another like to it, above a mile distant, there lay a pleasant valley of emerald green, and in the midst thereof a lake or mere, and a silvery stream feeding it from the high ground above. But that which held the eye more especially in this delectable prospect was a castle in the midst of the lake—a fortress of stone built in the Norman style, of no great magnitude, but having a keep, a courtyard, and divers appurtenances. 'Twas a goodly spectacle, this hoary shape engoldened by the sunlight, girt about with blue water, and all encompassed by the living green.

At the end of the lake nearest to us, I perceived the semblance of a jetty framed of wood, whereto a vessel like unto our Thames wherries was moored; and both on the vessel and the jetty I saw sundry folk, and likewise a few assembled in the courtyard. In the castle wall was a water-gate, which now lay open, bounded above by the teeth of a portcullis.

We stayed not our march, but descended the hillside towards the lake. And as I drew nearer, I perceived that the castle was in ill repair, the stonework weatherworn and crumbling, and the iron of the portcullis exceeding rusty, so that I misdoubted whether it were possible to be raised. Methought the place was of very ancient date, perchance of the time when, for our woe, Strongbow set his foot upon this country—destined to be a continual nursery of trouble to her English governors.

When we were come to the waterside, a man met me from the jetty, and speaking in the English of a five-years' bairn, invited me to enter the wherry. This I did, with my own men and some of those that were with us, and we were ferried over the lake, and into the castle by the water-gate, through a covered way that led from the lake into the courtyard.

Alighting from the wherry and ascending some few ragged stone steps, I found myself in the courtyard amid a strange medley of beasts and men. There were cattle, swine, and poultry enclosed in tumbledown pens, and set against the walls were rude cabins of wood overlaid with turfs, which I supposed to be the dwellings of serving men and retainers. Of mankind there were in the courtyard about a score, men, women and children, the men being for the greater part well stricken in years. All these folk gazed upon me as you see peasants gaze at quaint outlandish monsters in a country fair. My men were taken, by command already given, into one of the cabins aforesaid; but I myself was ushered through a postern into the keep, and up a winding stair to a chamber barely furnished with a stool and a truckle bed, whereon was laid in a heap a suit of woollen garments. These I donned with much contentment in exchange for my own sodden and miry raiment, a man standing at the door with his back to me all the time, a courtesy I little expected in such savages. When I was dry clad he conducted me down the stairs into a lofty and spacious hall, where food of the English sort

was spread upon a table. With this I was mightily refreshed and strengthened, for hard fortune had not bereft me of appetite, though I acknowledge my satisfaction was tempered by the recollection that I who had fought in campaigns with the greatest captains of the age had fallen an inglorious victim to a handful of wild Irish kernes.

Some while after the remains of my repast had been removed, and I was drumming my heels alone and in idleness, the door opened, and the maiden entered, and with her an old and withered dame of forbidding aspect and mien. A smile flickered upon the maiden's countenance as she beheld me, clad in coarse and ill-fitting garments, making my bow as courtly as to a queen.

"Our fare is poorer than I could wish," she said, "but 'tis our necessity at fault, not our good will."

"I thank you, mistress," said I, "and would fain beg that the same fare may be provided for my men, one of whom, I fear, was somewhat incommoded in the late misadventure."

"Their wants are supplied, sir," quoth she coldly; "and as for you, I desire that you will rest in such comfort as our poor means and the straitness of our dwelling may afford."

"In troth, mistress," said I, "I have known worse quarters and leaner fare; but desiring that you be at no more pains or charges in my behoof, I purpose with your leave to get me hence with all commendable speed as soon as my garments are dried, not forgetting that I owe my life to you."

At this she smiled again.

"Of what value your life may be to you or to your countrymen I know not," she said, "but at this present time it is of some worth to me."

"I am honoured, madam," said I in some puzzlement.

And then, seeing my wonder writ on my face, she laughed outright.

"I fear me, good sir, we are scarcely of one mind," she said. "Loth as I am to enforce you with any restraint, yet needs must I tell you that for a time you shall rest content to remain my guest."

"Shall, madam?" said I, with a lift of the eyes.

"Shall, sir," she repeated. "You shall be a hostage, a pledge for the fair treatment of my father."

"What have I to do with your father?" I asked, in my bewilderment.

"This: that your general has sworn to hang my father so soon as he lays hands on him, wherefore I have despatched a letter to your general to let him know that I have you in ward, and will surely execute upon you any violence or indignity that my father may suffer."

This she said with a firm voice, smiting the table with her little hand; and I knew in my heart that what she said, that the fair termagant would surely do.

[image]

"I WILL SURELY EXECUTE UPON YOU ANY VIOLENCE OR INDIGNITY THAT MY FATHER MAY SUFFER"

"And may I presume to ask, madam," said I, "the name of the gentleman upon whose safety my own salvation hangs?"

"His name, sir, is Kedagh O'Hagan: and yours?"

"A name of much less mark: Christopher Rudd, at your service."

"A knight?"

"Nay, madam, a plain gentleman."

She smiled a little at this, and continued—

"Well, Master Christopher Rudd, give me the word of a plain gentleman that you will use no endeavour to flee away, and I give you the freedom of this castle, such as it is."

"I thank you, madam, for your good will," said I, "but I have a larger notion of freedom. With your leave I will put no fetters on my discretion."

"Nor I on your limbs, and yet you shall be confined," said she; and after the exchange of sundry civil nothings between us, she departed with the ancient dame, who had stood by the while with arms folded upon her hips, and lips pressed together grimly.

The door was closed upon them, and by the voices that came to me through the timber I knew that two men had been set to guard me.

I had much to speculate upon in my solitude. This Kedagh O'Hagan, the damsel's father, was a notorious rebel, and a doughty lieutenant of the O'Neill. I knew that my general, Sir Arthur Chichester, had vowed to hang him, as she had said; but seeing that the fellow was slippery as an eel and had escaped us not a few times, I saw myself doomed in all likelihood to a long imprisonment unless peradventure I could make my escape. Moreover, if by any foul chance he should lose his life, the gallows was my certain destination, an ignominious end which I could not contemplate with any comfort or serenity.

From meditating on this I came to think of my fair hostess. I had seen full many a glorious beauty at the Queen's Court, and in France when I served King Henry, but none that so bewitched and teased me as this Irish maiden, with her red-gold hair, and her eyes of unsoundable blue, and her coral lips that curled the one above the other when she smiled. And the dulcet fluting of her voice, breathing out pure English with a faint smack of something outlandish and yet most pleasing, remained singing in my ears. Moreover her bold and mettlesome

spirit, yet not a whit unmaidenly, liked me well, and I considered within myself that I could be well content to enjoy her society during the few days which I needed for the perfect recovery of my strength. Her converse, methought, would sweeten my confinement until I should make my escape, whereto I was resolved.

I remained in that chamber while daylight endured, now ruminating, now reading in the one or two books that my fair jailer had set there for me—some poems of Master Spenser, Tottel's *Miscellany*, and sundry other volumes which I marvelled to find in that barbarous land; and it chancing that my supper was brought to me by that man that had some smattering of English, I fell on talk with him, to learn somewhat, if I might, of his fair mistress. Her name was Sheila, he told me—quaint and pretty to my ears; she was her father's sole child, and the apple of his eye. She had dwelt some time in England, her father having been carried there a hostage, but loved Ireland, said the man. He told me also that she was vehemently besought in marriage by a young chieftain of that neighbourhood, one Rory Mac Shane, betwixt whose family and her own there was an ancient feud. 'Twas Mac Shane's purpose to end the feud by this alliance, but he was looked upon with loathing both by the maiden and by her father, not only because of the inveterate enmity between the two houses, but also because they disliked the man himself, a robustious unlettered fellow, a foul liver, and one that constantly besotted himself with usquebagh, a vile drink of the country. Mac Shane had sworn, so it was told me, to wed the maiden, will she, nill she, for which reason had her father conveyed her to this castle in the lake, as being more easily defended than his greater seat a few miles distant. I had oft-times heard of the raids made one upon another by these petty Irish chiefs, and my informant did not question but that some time, when occasion served, Mac Shane would seek to attain his end by violence. In this case I could not but marvel that O'Hagan had left his daughter, and withdrawn the main part of his people to assist O'Neill; but reflected that he must know his own business best, and so dismissed the matter.

IV

At fall of night I was led upstairs again to the small chamber wherein I had made my change of clothes. The door was locked and barred upon me, and by divers faint noises that I heard I knew that sentinels were set without to guard me. Being wondrous fatigued I slept very soundly, and was awakened only when a sunbeam falling athwart my bed struck upon my eyes. I rose up, and all being

silent, made a more thorough survey of my room than I had done afore. 'Twas by measurement of my paces not above ten feet square, and had a single window, not closed with glass, looking upon the lake forty or fifty feet beneath. The wall was thick, and the window was splayed inwards, being upwards of an ell in breadth on the inner side, but no more than three spans on the outer; and here 'twas divided in twain from top to bottom by a bar of iron, set in the stonework.

This bar I perceived to be deeply rusted, like the iron of the portcullis above the water-gate, and methought I could with a vehement wrench or two force it from its sockets, and so leave a clear space and a way of escape. But when I leant upon the sill and contemplated the water beneath, of whose depth I was ignorant, I was somewhat mistrustful of my success if I should attempt so great a dive. My further meditation of this matter was hindered by the noise of unlocking and unbarring, and I was seated upon my bed when a man entered, to bid me descend to break my fast in the chamber below.

The second day of my imprisonment was like unto the first, save that my fair chatelaine did not deign to visit me, but sent me greetings by her servitor. At this, without any reason, I was somewhat vexed, having counted on seeing her comeliness and hearing the music of her speech. I took no pleasure in reading of Colin Clout or Astrophel, laying down my book, and striding about the room in dudgeon. But as I went I pondered that matter of escaping by the window, which, though narrow, would let me through, my body having been marvellously thinned by my late sickness. My splash into the water, if 'twere heard by one of my guards, would bring a boat in chase of me ere I could win to the bank, swam I never so strongly. And if by good luck I were neither heard nor seen, yet I misdoubted of my safety, for I was in poor health, unarmed, ignorant of the country, and in no case to adventure myself in a guideless journey over those rugged hills, the haunt and lair of maybe thousands of the wild Irish, ay, and with a hue and cry ringing behind me. What with these my doubts and fears, and the neglect (as I called it) of the mistress of the castle, the day lingered out very discomfortably, and I went to my bed at odds with myself and all men.

On the next day, after breakfast, my servant Stubbs was admitted to me. He told me that he and my Irishmen were treated very handsomely, the lady of the castle herself visiting them twice a day and inquiring of their welfare.

"She's a beauty, sir," said the man heartily.

"And my neck is in a noose," said I, feeling a twinge of jealousy in that Stubbs had been favoured above me, and I told him of my being a hostage for the life of the maid's father.

"Why, then, the general will have a care that he comes to no harm," said Stubbs, "seeing that an English gentleman is of more value than many mere Irish."

"In his own conceit," said that sweet and tunable voice, and the lady came

into the room, attended as before by her ancient dame of the sour visage. "Good morrow, Master Rudd."

"Good morrow, Mistress Sheila," said I, shooting a look at her as I made my bow.

A flush mantled her cheek at this hearing of her name.

"I brook no plots nor complots between you two," said she. "I bade your servant attend you as a grace, Master Rudd."

"For which you have my hearty thanks, madam," said I. "The conversation of your servitor is a child's babble, and the reading of your books breeds only discontent."

"You have but to give your word, and you are free to range this castle, sir," said she.

"'Twould be but to beat my wings against the bars of my cage," said I.

"A bird, quotha!" said she, laughing. "His feathers are ruffled, and he stints his song."

"He has no mate, madam," said I; and after more bandying of words, she departed again.

So passed some few days, the while I nursed my strength for the attempt whereon I was resolved. The lady paid me fitful visits, and I looked for them ever more wistfully. Once, when I had not seen her for thirty hours or more, I dared to read aloud at her entrance, from the book of Master Spenser's sonnets upon my knees, the concluding verses—

"Dark is my day, whiles her fair light I miss,
And dead my life that wants such lively bliss;"

whereupon she took the book from my hand, averring that such woebegone stuff would but addle my wits. She spoke as one chiding a froward child, and I acknowledged to myself that she had dealt tenderly with my presumption. One day when she came to me I perceived that all was not well with her. Her bright hue was faded, her eye was sad, and whereas she was wont to be merry with quips, answering me right saucily, her spirit was now leaden. She heard me in silence, and heaved many a sigh. I guessed that she had received ill news, and by little and little I got from her what it was that so much troubled her. She told me that the O'Neill had been signally worsted, and was withdrawing himself deeper into his mountain fastnesses. She feared for her father's safety, and then, with a flash of her old spirit, she struck my table and declared right vehemently—

"If my father is taken, and suffers what is threatened against him, I vow, Master Rudd, that you shall dangle from the castle wall, a feast for kites and crows."

And then she broke into a passion of weeping and fled out of the room.

This news came as a rude shock to the contentment into which I had let myself be lulled; and fearing lest in the heat of battle Kedagh O'Hagan should come to harm even against the commandment of my general, I saw that it behoved me, if I would put my neck beyond jeopardy, to slip the noose at once. I had no manner of doubt that the girl would do even as she had said, out of duty, though I believed that she held me in no disfavour in my proper person.

I determined therefore to put my plan in practice in the early part of that night, so that, if I should come safe to shore, I might have the hours of darkness to cover my flight. But my design was frustrated by much coming and going betwixt the shore and the castle. It was plain that some enterprise was afoot, and from my little window looking forth, I watched the daylight sink into night without any diminution of the busy movements below.

But when the small hours crept on, and all around was wrapt in an immense stillness, and a snoring in two several tones proclaimed that my guardians were asleep, I clambered up into the embrasure, and, employing one of the legs of my truckle bed as a lever, with as little noise as might be, I forced the rusty iron bar from its sockets; which done, I loosed part of my outer garments, and having made them into a bundle with my boots, I tore my coverlid into strips and knit them into a cord, and tied my bundle to one end of it. The other end I knotted about the bar, which I laid transversely across the window, and then let down the bundle into the depths towards the lake.

Upon hauling it up I discovered that it was dry, whereby I learnt that my rope was not of length sufficient to touch the water, though having used all my convenient bedding I knew that it could not fall far short. I deemed neither the rope nor the bar stout enough to bear my own weight, and saw that I must needs dive into the lake, and take my chance. Accordingly I turned myself sideways, and so contrived to squeeze my shoulders through the narrow opening, not without fear lest I should lose my balance, and topple down in a heap without the opportunity of poising for the clean dive that would best ensure my safety and cause the least noise.

Having let down my bundle again, I was now able to see (for the summer sky had some luminancy) that it came within a little of the water. As I crouched there upon the sill I was in no little tremor and dread, for if there should be a watchman upon the keep, as was most like, he would scarce but hear the splash I should make. I stretched my ears for sounds within and without, below and above, and when all was yet silent I gathered myself together, and without poising, for which there was no room, I lifted myself on a sudden, and extending my arms above me made the best shift I could for the dive.

'Twas as though I hurled myself upon stone, so mighty was the shock of

my entering the water. Methought in my confusion of wits 'twas an age before I came to the surface, gasping for my breath. In a daze I trod water until my senses were some little restored; then, hearkening with all my ears, but hearing nought, I swam close beneath the wall, until I found my bundle dangling, and thereupon tugging upon the cord I snapped it, and set the bundle upon my head. There I held it with one hand, while with the other I struck out towards the shore; at which arriving I scrambled up the bank, and sped away as fleetly as I might to the shelter of a copse hard by. Here, all winded as I was with swift running after my dive and swim, I made short work of stripping off my wet clothes, and donning the dry raiment and the boots which I had brought in my bundle; which done, I wrung out my sodden things, tied them about my back with the cord, and making a cast as well as I could for the English fort I had lately left, I turned my back upon the lake and the castle, and issued forth from among the trees to plod over those unknown barren hills.

V

The sky, as I told you, rendered a pale light, it being high summer; and I was rather dismayed than pleased when I saw the moon's pale sphere stretching a bow beyond the further hills. The more light, the less chance of shunning an enemy. Truly, I could have been thankful for a lanthorn upon my path, for I had need to go slowly and heedfully, lest I should find myself embogged, of which my one experience was more than enough. I laboured over the ground, making small headway, for where 'twas not marshy 'twas rugged and bestrewn with loose stones, and where 'twas none of these, I was annoyed with pestering thorns or entangled underwood. And the short summer darkness was already dissolving with the dawn.

I looked back over the way I had come, and saw the lake not above two miles off, below me, and the castle rose-tinted in the sun's ray. Even now, I thought, the nimble kernes, whose fleetness of foot exceeds that of a horse, might run me down, if my escape had become known. I considered whether to seek a hiding-place, in some bosky covert or some brier-clad hole in the hills; but bethought myself that I must then lie quiet all day without food, and maybe lose myself when I came forth in the night. It seemed to me best to keep right on, watching my steps, and shrouding myself with such brushwood and overhanging cliffs as I might encounter on my way.

Presently after I had thus resolved, I came unawares out of the trackless

ground upon a beaten path, which methought led in the direction of my course. To follow this path stood me in some danger of meeting my foes; yet I should make speedier progress upon it, and have my eyes for scanning the country instead of for taking heed of bogs or pitfalls. Therefore I cast away all scruples of timidity and struck with assured gait into the path.

'Twas not long before I repented of my temerity. On a sudden I heard a patter of feet before me, and ere I could slip aside for hiding there came into my sight, round a bend in the path, a man of lofty stature, running as for a prize. At one and the same instant we halted upon our feet, the runner and I, being divided by no more than thirty paces. I had but just perceived by his garb that the man was an Irishman when he leapt from the path down a shelving grassy bank at his right hand, and bounded like a hunted stag towards a clump of woodland no great distance away.

Bethinking me in a flash that every Irishman hereabout was an enemy, and that this man, were he to escape, might fetch a horde of his wild fellows upon my track, I sprang after him, in my soul doubting whether with my utmost endeavour I could overtake him. For some little time the man outsped me, but coming to the skirts of the woodland he suddenly stumbled, sought desperately to recover his footing, and then sank upon the ground. Gathering my speed, in four leaps I was upon him, and closed with him, expecting that he would strive with me for the mastery; but he lay limp and lumpish in my hands, his eyes beseeching mercy. So stout of frame he was, I was no little amazed at my easy victory, until I saw by his laboured breathing, the quivering of his nostrils, and the pallor of his cheeks, that he was utterly spent. This put me in a quandary. I had a mind to leave him and go my way; but in a moment I saw that I might perchance make some profit of him. Taking a portion of the cord about my bundle, I bound his hands behind him, and when the heaving of his naked breast was somewhat stilled, I bade him arise and lead me to the English camp, fearing the while lest he should be of the wild barbarians that knew no tongue but their own. But at my words he looked me in the face, and told me that the English were many miles away, marching northward.

[image]

GATHERING MY SPEED, IN FOUR LEAPS I WAS UPON HIM

I asked him how he knew, whereupon he said that he had himself been among them. Questioning him further, by degrees I learnt that he was one of the band that had followed Kedagh O'Hagan into the field. Two days before a battle

had been fought betwixt the rebels and the army of my general, and this man had been taken, but having escaped by night, he had fled for refuge to the cabin of his sister, whose husband was a henchman to Rory Mac Shane. The husband being absent, the man had learnt in talk with his sister that Mac Shane had gathered his men, with the intent to fall upon the lake-castle of O'Hagan while he was footing it with the rebels, and to carry away the maiden whom he had sworn to wed. At this news the man, in loyal service to his chief, brake from his sister, and ran all night over the hills to warn his mistress of the peril threatening her. Being not yet recovered of the fatigue of marching and the stress of battle; having, moreover, followed an indirect and winding course to avoid the raiders of Rory Mac Shane, who were already on foot; the man had overtaxed his strength in running, and so fallen helpless into my hands.

In my course through the world I had gained some skill in reading men, and was not easily deceived when those I had to do with were artless and simple, not versed in the tricks of courtiers, nor trained to mask their thoughts like the ambassadors of kings. The man's bearing was honest; his story fitted both with his present sorry case and with what I had heard before; briefly, I did not doubt him. And when I inquired of him where these raiders might be, and he told me that they were not above three miles from the place where we then stood, and full in my path, I could not but look upon this encounter as a fortunate accident for me.

And now I had perforce to choose what I must do. I could not proceed in safety until Mac Shane and his raiders were no longer between me and my goal, and I considered whether I should hide myself a while, and let the man continue his journey, and so warn his mistress of what was to come; or, making assurance doubly sure, I might hold him in hiding with me until the danger of interception was past, then leave him well tied up, and go my way: in which case the lady must remain unwarned. And as I thought thereon, and my mind's eye dwelt upon that piece of loveliness, forlorn in her ruinous castle, with few to help her, and remembered what I had been told of this Rory Mac Shane, a violent and besotted savage, on a sudden I felt the blood rush to my temples, and without more ado, scarce knowing what secret motive impelled me, I caught up my prisoner, unloosed his bonds, bade him pluck up heart, and, supporting his half-fainting form with my arm, set forth with hasty step towards the quarter whence I had come.

For all that I was cumbered with the poor wretch, I made better speed back than forth, because he knew the way, and avoided rough and quaggy places. The morning was yet young, wanting something of four o' the clock when we came to the lake-side, and I felt a passion of wrath spring within me at what had formerly served me well—namely, the culpable neglect of watch and ward upon

the castle. There was no lookout man posted upon the keep; not a soul stirring on battlements or in courtyard: a heinous lack of precaution which could not but set on edge the nerves of any man with the least experience of war. God-a-mercy, thought I, is this the Irish manner of guarding fair ladies? No eye had spied us as we descended the hillside; and when, at the water's brink, we set up a loud halloo, we might have been wolves howling in a wilderness for all the stir we made.

Ofttimes as we came the Irishman had glanced back timorously along the path, and now he clutched me by the arm and stretching forth his hand, pointed to a regiment of dusky shapes moving against the sky behind us; which seeing, and being in no manner of doubt what they were, I made a trumpet of my hands and let forth a shout like to split my lungs. And then, above the broken parapet of the tower, a woman's form appeared, and stood there a brief space at gaze, then vanished from my sight. Still bellowing my loudest, I saw men moving in the courtyard, and presently from the water-gate the wherry shot forth under the strokes of two oarsmen. The Irishman by my side called to them in their own tongue, and they made great haste, and we waded into the lake to meet them, and leapt into the vessel, which swung about and conveyed us with all speed over the water and through the gate. I perceived the countenances of these oarsmen how they were blank with stark amazement, their eyes resting upon me as upon one risen from the dead; and the women in the courtyard crossed themselves and fell back from me as I passed among them, and 'twas told me afterward they held me for a wizard.

[image]

HE CLUTCHED ME BY THE ARM AND POINTED TO A REGIMENT OF DUSKY SHAPES

And there at the postern leading into the keep stood my lady, very straight and still, a high colour in her cheeks and a fire in her eyes. I bent myself, saluting her, and said—

"I fear me, madam, I seem thankless in quitting the castle without paying my respects to its fair mistress, but you were, I trust, lapped in quiet slumber when your caged night-bird took wing. Yet am I soon come back to roost, for it chanced that in my flight I crossed a servitor of yours, and he——"

"And he snared the simple fowl, and brought him to be plucked," she said, with a curling lip.

"Simple fool, in good sooth, I may be, madam," said I, "yet 'twas not he

carried me back, but rather that which he carried."

She looked in puzzlement from me to the Irishman, and from him again to me, and I would very willingly have engaged further in tossing the ball but for the grave news I bore. Breaking off suddenly, I told her with seriousness than within the fourth part of an hour Rory Mac Shane with his posse of rascals would be at her gates.

"It behoves your folk to show," I said, "that they can fight better than they watch; and with your leave, while your man here tells his tale in gross, I will make bold to set things in order for defence."

I did not wait for an answer, but turned abruptly from her (noting how her wrath was kindled against me), and sought my servant and the Irishmen my comrades in captivity. Them I informed of what was toward, and gave commands for the Irishmen to convey to their fellow countrymen. My assured mien and peremptory speech carried it with them, and with Mistress Sheila too, who was so much taken aback by my masterfulness, as well as engrossed with the tale poured out in the Irish tongue by her man, as that she was in a manner fixed and immovable like a monument.

But this posture endured but a little. Being informed of all that had happened, she came flying to me in the midst of the courtyard, and a wondrous light shone upon her face, and she thrust out her hands towards me, and cried—

"Oh, sir, I crave your pardon, and I thank you."

I took her hand and kissed it in the manner of a courtier, yet mayhap with something less formality.

"But haste, sir!" she cried again. "The wherry is yours. Get you, you and your men, to the other side, and escape while yet there is time."

"Madam," I said, "I and my men have no other wish than to serve you."

"I beseech you, endanger not your life in a quarrel that is not your own," she said.

"I trow I make it my own," said I, with a forthright quick look. An instant our glances clung; then she veiled her enkindling eyes, and turning aside hastily, clasped hands with the sour-faced dame who had now come forth, a fearsome dragon, from the postern door.

VI

My heart sang as I went about the business of my assumed captaincy. She left all to me, and ever and anon as I was in the midst of my activities I saw her eyes

fasten upon me and smile encouragement and sweet trust. I was in my element now that war's alarm was sounding. Never in my life before had I addressed myself to fight so gaily as now. I had fought for treasure, for dear friends, for a noble king, for honour and truth and liberty; but never, as it chanced, had it fallen to my lot to battle for a lady. And when I thought of Rory Mac Shane—faugh! what a mouthful of ugliness his name!—I laughed within myself, and *lo triumphe* rang a joyous peal in my head.

But I must come back to my tale.

Leaving my good fellow Stubbs, who had caught fire from me, to muster all the serviceable varlets in the courtyard, I made haste to mount to the top of the keep, to judge how long a time for preparation I had before the enemy should come. They were, as I guessed, a good mile away. I descended, and as swiftly as might be I ranged through all the castle, now wholly open to me, and observed in my hasty survey those points where it was most vulnerable. Meantime I had commanded that all weapons of every sort should be carried into the courtyard, and coming there again, I parted them among the garrison, a pitiful poor rabble as was ever mustered to defend a fortress. There were not so many as I had seen when first I came to the place, and I began to suspect that some faint-hearted rascals had hidden themselves away in tenderness for their skins. But when I turned to the lady to ask of this matter—she stood queenly on the step of the postern—she told me that the night before she had dispatched sundry stout fellows with munition and victuals to her father, who had sent word that he was in dire straits, cooped up in a wild place by the English forces. By this I knew the meaning of that coming and going which had delayed my flight, yet for which I was now beyond measure thankful, seeing that otherwise I should have got clean away (so I flattered myself), and my lady had been lost.

Yet this diminishment of my forces was a grievous matter, as I saw very well when, going again to the battlemented roof, I descried the enemy pouring down the hillside, a rout of nigh two hundred men, but not marching in the ordered ranks of disciplined soldiers. They were all afoot, a rabble of half-naked kernes, equipped some with darts, some with bows and arrows, a mere few with matchlocks. I saw with great thankfulness that they had no artillery, so that we need fear no battering and breaching of the walls. And then, wondering how they purposed to come across the lake, I perceived that many of them bore massy bundles, the nature whereof I could not determine. And as I stood peering over the parapet, I was aware that Mistress Sheila was at my side, and turned to her, asking without preface what those bundles might be. She told me that they were boats, made of the hides of beasts strained over a framework of osiers.

"An armada, sooth!" I cried, feigning a cheerfulness I did not own. "King Rory apes King Philip, and comes a-wooing with a fleet."

She flashed me a look, and her lips quivered.

"You are not afraid, mistress?" said I.

"Was your Queen afraid with her captains about her?" she said; and in a murmur, soft as a mavis' evening note, she added: "I trust my captain too."

And she laid in my hand my own sword, which had been taken from me when I was lugged from the slough.

"List to me, mistress," I said, stilling my leaping pulse, for our peril was near. "Do you bring all the women and children to this place, and when I have descended, bolt the door upon me. You and they will be safe here, while we beat off the enemy below."

She nodded her head, and fled away, coming back a while after with the beldam and the rest of the women, young and old, all huddling like silly sheep, moaning and crying, spite of the rebukes of their high-hearted mistress. I bade her good-bye and sped down the stairs, hearing the grating of the bolt behind me, and came to the courtyard, where the men were assembled expecting me.

I had already resolved upon my plan of defence. Our chiefest danger, as I saw, was that the enemy, when they had crossed the lake, would by some means mount the ruinous wall of the courtyard, that rose but three men's height above the water, and so swarm upon us. This wall was upwards of two hundred ells in circuit, not of a perfect roundure, but irregular, according to the shape of the rock whereon the castle was built. With my few men it would go hard with us to hold so long a line, and I foresaw that if the enemy pushed us with any vigour, we must needs give way before them. But I had determined upon resisting them at the wall so long time as we might, and when we could no longer withstand them, we should withdraw ourselves into the keep, where even with a handful I deemed it possible to fend them off and endure if need be a long siege.

When I had posted my men at divers points along the wall, suddenly I bethought me of the water-gate, which gave entrance directly into the courtyard. I remembered that the portcullis was raised, and had the look of being immovable; but 'twas madness to leave the gate utterly without defence, and so I called Stubbs to my side, and bade him find tools wherewith we might endeavour to remedy this discommodity. While he was gone about this quest, I looked around, and beheld with no little indignation the Lady Sheila standing at the postern of the keep, watching me.

"Get you up to the roof, mistress," I said peremptorily, hastening to her. "This is no place for you."

"How now!" she cried. "Am I a maid-servant to be commanded hither and thither? Mistress of this castle I stay, sir, and go where I will."

"Must I e'en carry you?" I said, very foolishly, not knowing thoroughly the quality of the maid.

"Sirrah, you were best not try," she said, and when I, still in my folly (and yet 'twas for her good), stretched out my hands to do as I had said, she fetched me a buffet that sent me reeling.

"Virago!" I cried, my ear stinging with the blow.

"Upstart!" she made answer, and then with a swift change she said meekly: "I pray you, good Master Rudd, let me stay."

Before I could answer, Stubbs came to me with the tools, and since time was precious I went at once with him to the gate, and by dint of hewing and hacking we contrived to drop the portcullis, and so shut up the entrance that might otherwise have been our undoing. Which was no sooner done than a loud cry summoned me to the wall, and mounting thereon I saw the rabblement gathered on the further shore, and in the forefront a man of vast stature with a head like a bull-calf, and fat red cheeks bulging out from a shaggy mane the colour of hay. He wore no cap, but his form was clad in a loose tunic of saffron hue, leather treads to his ankles, and great shoes of undressed hide. Flourishing a two-handed sword, he bellowed something in the execrable tongue of these savages, and my Irishman at my side said that he called upon the Lady Sheila to yield up the castle and make her humble submission.

"Methinks his name should be Roarer Mac Shane," said I, and I went to inform the damsel of his demand. "What is your answer, mistress, to this windy swain? He is young and over-grown, which may excuse the tempestuous manner of his wooing."

"Tell him I deny him and defy him," she cried ringingly. "I am daughter of Kedagh O'Hagan!"

When this was repeated by my Irishman, Mac Shane vented another blast of foul breath, and at his command a company of his ruffians hied them to the woods towards the north side of the lake, and fell to cutting timber, which they proceeded to fashion into rafts, binding the logs together with ropes they had brought with them: manifestly Mac Shane had not expected the lady to spring into his arms. While this was doing, others of the ragged crew built light ladders, setting at the top iron hooks wherewith to catch the wall. These preparations were little to my liking, and I saw that there was rough work before us.

And now becoming aware of my emptiness, for I had neither eaten nor drunk since my supper overnight, I considered there was time to make a meal, without overhaste, for 'twould certainly be an hour or two ere the rafts and ladders were finished. My fair lady served me with her own hands, and paid me little heed when I said she must be sparing of victuals, but heaped upon my platter plenty of broiled flesh garnished with shamrock, a herb of the country, with fair white bread, butter (somewhat rancid), and a great horn of mead.

"Great warriors must needs be great eaters," she said, sitting composedly

over against the window near to the ancient gossip her companion, whom she had fetched from above, and who had never yet said a word in my hearing.

"But not great eaters great warriors," said I, in her vein.

"No, or swine would be the most warlike of beasts," she said. Then, resting her chin upon her hand: "Tell me, Master Captain Rudd, the manner of your escape. My women say you are a necromancer."

"Why, mistress, then by my black art conjured myself into the shape of a simple fowl, and spread my wings, and hey!"

"Tush! Tell me true," she said. "Such fables are for children."

"Well then," said I, "since I may not be a bird, what say you to a fish?"

"I cannot abide 'em, save broiled, and with sauce," she said.

"Then may the broiling I shall suffer this day, and the sauce of good hard knocks, bring me to the top of your good favour," said I. "But, indeed, I swim like a fish, and dive like a duck—"

"Or a goose?" she caught me up.

"But with no quackery," said I, "I heaved myself up to my window-sill—"

"Then you should have been trussed," she said.

"Nay, madam, the trust is yours," said I; "and from the sill I leapt into your lake, and so got myself, somewhat damp and muddied, to the further shore."

"And without a wound?" she said, catching at her breath.

"Save in my heart," I said in a low voice.

"What! hath any Englishman a heart?" she said; and then as I glanced at the frowning dame beside her, she cried right merrily—

"Oh, she knows no English!" and then with some confusion and haste she asked me of the Queen and the Court, and led me insensibly to relate to her some particulars of my past life, whereby the time sped away so fast, and I had so far forgotten the posture of our affairs, that I suffered a shock when Stubbs came running to me and said that the Irishmen were setting across. I called myself an ass, snatched my sword, and made to the door.

"God bless thee with perseverance!" said the maid softly, using the Queen's words in that brief epistle, which I had shown to her in our discourse; and with those sweet tones making melody in my heart I went forth to try a bout with Rory Mac Shane.

VII

When I came to the wall I beheld a half-score of the hide-boats being propelled

over the lake, and four or five of the new-made platforms, each one pressed down by the burthen of men upon it. The number of our assailants was, I suppose, above a hundred, and against them we had less than a score. These by my appointment had taken post along the wall, having, besides their weapons, fragments of rock gathered from the ruinous battlements, stink-pots of homely device, and such other missiles as the people had been able to prepare. Of firearms we had but two old rusty pieces, my own pistol and the guns of my men having been sent away the night before with the succours dispatched to Kedagh O'Hagan. But I observed joyfully that our assaulters were in little better case in that regard, for when their quaint, unsteady vessels had come within shot of us, they discharged upon us only two or three bullets, which did us no harm, so ill-directed were they. My man Stubbs and another fellow gave them a shot apiece in reply, or rather they would have done, had not Stubbs' musket burst in his hand, one of the fragments striking his brow and stunning him for some time. He bore the mark of it to his dying day.

As for the other men, I had charged them to do nothing until the adversary should come directly beneath the wall. In their haste and eagerness they did not all obey my behest, but the most part did, so that the vessels, when they drew in under, were assailed by a tempest of missiles which did much execution, and sent one of the frail barks of hide topsy-turvy to the bottom. Our garrison suffered no hurt at this first onset, save that one foolish old man, forgetful of my warning to cover himself with the wall, peered over to see what had been done, and fell with a dart in his throat.

But we being so few, certain of the enemy's vessels escaped hurt altogether; and were no sooner beneath the wall than their crews hoisted the ladders, and fixing the hooks in crevices and gaps of the stonework, began incontinently to swarm aloft. Even the ladders were more in number than all the men of the garrison, and had Rory Mac Shane possessed a jot of generalship, it would have gone hardly with us. But he had taken no care that all his men should begin to mount at the same instant. Every man did what seemed good in his own eyes, so that we were able to run from one ladder to another, and with push of pike, or knife-thrust, or indeed with bare fists, to hurl the climbers down into the water or upon their platforms, ere they could make good their footing on the wall. This was, moreover, the easier for us, inasmuch as only one man could ascend each ladder at one time.

Yet we were hard put to it, I assure you. I had posted Stubbs at one end of our spread line, holding myself at the other, both of us ready to hasten to any spot that might seem more desperately menaced. So nimble were the attackers that we had much ado to convey ourselves with speed enough from point to point, and I am sure that neither he nor I had ever in our lives before so vigorously bestirred

ourselves. Not once nor twice did we come in the bare nick of time where the danger threatened, and it being midday, and hot, we were soon reeking with our sweat.

From the beginning I had marked Rory Mac Shane himself, and kept as close a watch upon him as in the press and hurry I could. Being, as I have said, a man of monstrous bulk, he was not so nimble in his motions as the leaner fry, nor did not essay to mount upon a ladder among the first. But as I turned from dealing with one hardy climber, I espied Mac Shane, a good way off, swing himself from the top of his ladder and throw one leg across the wall, plying a doughty sword against an ancient servitor that sought to stay him with his pike. At the very instant of my spying him, he cleft the pike shaft clean through with his blade, and dealt the old man so grievous a wound that he dropt to the ground, coughing out his life-blood. I had leapt towards him, and immediately afterwards came upon him a-tilt; and having the advantage of him, as being balanced insecurely on the wall, I doubt not I should have sped him but that the dying man lay heaped between us. Whereby my sweeping stroke failed somewhat of its full momentum, and Mac Shane turned my sword aside as it was in the very act of falling upon his head. But giving back before my onslaught, he was dislodged from his perch, and toppled with a lusty shout backward into the water.

I had not time to look what had become of him, even had it been prudent to show my head above the parapet, being drawn to another part of the wall on a like errand. But after a minute or two, when I noted a faltering in the attack, I supposed that he had at the least got some damage, and hoped that it was grievous enough to render him unable for further fighting. There came no more men up the ladders; which seeing, we clambered upon the wall, and beheld the whole rout setting their craft towards the shore, some few, who had lost their standing, swimming by their side. We sped them on their way with a shower of whatsoever missiles we could first lay hands upon, and discovered that in the hurry of their flight they had left two of their ladders still hooked upon the wall. These we took as trophies. I was nowise ill-pleased to see Rory Mac Shane in his boat bearing marks of his discomfiture, his yellow hair falling lank like seaweed over his cheeks, and his obese frame seeming somewhat shrunken by reason that his sodden clothing hung more closely upon him.

When I turned from observing him, the Lady Sheila met me, bearing a brimming cup of mead.

”’Tis nectar, from a hand fair as Hebe’s,” said I, quaffing deeply.

The lustre left her face, and she looked stonily upon me, whereat in some surprise I said—

”Why, mistress, have I said aught amiss?”

”Nay, sir, what you say is naught to me, but—but I like not to be equalled

with some English wench.”

”Good now!” said I, and could not forbear smiling. ”Know you, mistress, that Hebe was no English wench, but a fair maiden of most illustrious lineage, daughter of gods, herself a goddess, eternally young, and her office was to bear the wine-cup of the high Olympians, and I bethink me she was given as wife to Hercules himself.”

”Oh, mock me not with your Hebes and your Hercules!” she cried in a pet. ”I wish I had not brought you drink.”

”Nay, madam, for that I thank you heartily; and I shall hope to give you a better opinion of those of whom the poets sing, after this business is concluded.”

”A long after, I fear me,” she said, with a look of trouble.

”Why no; I trow we have taught them a lesson,” I said.

”You English are puffed up with your own conceit,” she cried scornfully. ”Think you an Irishman, and Rory Mac Shane, will be daunted by one failure? He is reputed the best fighter of all men hereabout. But indeed, Master Rudd”—and ’twas marvellous how sudden her mood would change—”indeed, we talk idly, when my poor servants lie wounded. Help me, good sir, to tend them.”

”Two are past help, madam,” I said gravely; ”the rest have suffered little hurt.”

She flew from me to the old man slain by Rory Mac Shane, and I saw the fair maid drop upon her knees, and breathe a prayer with moist eyes for the poor soul departed.

There was peace and a great quietude all that afternoon, though I took it to be that ominous calm which oft precedes a storm. Ever and anon there came to my ears from the distant woodland the ringing of axes, and I guessed that more ladders were to be made, and my heart sank; for with twice the number the adversaries would be too many for us to deal with piecemeal. But the day wore to evening, and the sun went down, and yet there was nothing done. I had set watchmen upon the battlements, to inform me if they saw aught; but when the country was blanketed in darkness, and the silence was unbroken save by the croaking of frogs about the margin of the lake, I supposed that our foes were taking their rest, to fortify themselves against the labours of another day.

It wanted an hour or two of midnight when my man Stubbs came to me from his outpost on the walls, and told me that the fleet of rafts and hide-boats had put forth from the shore, and was approaching in a ghostly silence. Now I have never held it a part of valiancy in a true warrior to oppose himself to invincible odds. My men being so few and weak, ’twas against reason that they should withstand a more numerous foe, who, taught by precedent mishap, would without question avoid their former errors, and, covered by the darkness, set up their ladders more thickly than we could counter. I shrank from throwing lives away

vainly, and saw that we must abandon our outer rampart, and shut ourselves within the keep, whereto there was but one entrance, from the courtyard, and behind whose massy door I thought we should be safe. Accordingly I gathered all my company and withdrew them into the keep, barring the door with my own hand, and I sent the men into the watch-house above the door, bidding them hurl their missiles upon the heads of the enemy when they should make to assault us.

My prescience was approved ere many minutes were past. Looking from a window in the keep, I saw the wall thick with dark shapes mounting from innumerable ladders, and leaping down into the courtyard with scarce a sound. Some of them turned about, and began to haul on ropes, and there came over the wall two or three of their rafts, whereat I wondered, not divining what purpose these could serve. But in a little I saw their cunning device, for the Irishmen hoisted the rafts upon their shoulders, and employing them in the manner of what the Romans called a testudo, advanced, thus defended, towards the door of the keep. The missiles launched on them from above bounded off from those broad shields, as I knew by hearing rather than sight, for being now come within the shadow of the keep they were no longer visible.

Expecting a vehement onset upon the door, I ran down and posted myself with Stubbs and two or three more at the foot of the stairway. Mistress O'Hagan, in defiance of my express charge, had not taken refuge upon the roof with her household women, but stayed in a little room hard by the first winding of the stair. As it fell out, this flat obstinacy turned to our advantage.

We waited there at the foot of the stair, holding our weapons in readiness; but when, after some time, no assault was made upon the door, I began to be uneasy, and wished I might contrive to see what was a-doing. We were in utter darkness, and such poor candles as were commonly used would not suffice to cast an effectual light a yard length beyond the wall; but a thought coming into my head, I bade Stubbs take command of the men, and running upstairs to the lady, asked her if she had any means of making torches or flares. Instantly she led me by a back stair to a lower room where was a quantity of tow, and while I shredded this and fashioned it to my purpose, she fetched me a pot of swine's lard and two long and slender chains. Then returning to the upper room, we kindled these flares, and let them down over the window-sill into the courtyard, amid a great outcry from the enemy. By their light we saw the courtyard swarming with men, and our people were able to take surer aim with their missiles; but we had little good of them, as you shall see.

I observed that the penthouse of rafts was still about the door, and was much perplexed as to what was a-doing there. On a sudden the rafts fell with a clatter upon the ground, and the men whom they had sheltered ran swiftly towards the wall, whither their comrades had retreated so as they might be the

farthest possible from our missiles. The meaning of their behaviour flashed upon my mind, and in my haste letting fall the chain I held, I caught Mistress Sheila about the waist, and carried her swiftly into her inner room. I had but just set her down, she still grasping her chain, when from below there burst a shattering din, and the keep seemed to rock upon its base. Springing down the stairs, I rushed into the bitter smother of gunpowder smoke, and saw by the light of my dropped flare, that shone through a rent in the door, the men I had left thrown down in a heap upon the floor. One of them was dead, but the rest, though bruised and shaken, recovered from their benumbment in time to stand with me upon the lowest stairs, before the enemy, leaping across the courtyard, came with fierce shouts to enter by the breach they had made.

Happily it was so narrow as that only two men could come through abreast, and the stair wound in such sort that we had free play for our right arms, while the enemy were impeded by the round of the wall. So close cramped were we that there was no place for the subtleties of fence, in which we might have had some superiority over our less skilled adversaries. Stubbs and I, standing the lowest, plied our swords, made for nicer work, with mere vehemency, beating aside the weapons of our assailants, and using our points whenever we could. Behind us were two Irishmen armed with pikes, which they thrust between us, with no small risk to ourselves; and yet higher, a man hurled stones over our heads upon the thickening crowd.

The stairway rang with the clash of steel, the shouts of the enemy, and the groans of such as fell to our weapons. So little light had we from the expiring flare, and so confused was the mellay, that for some little while I was unable to discern the form of him I especially sought; but at length I perceived Rory Mac Shane striding over the prone bodies at the foot of the stairs, and mounting among three or four of his men. I was thinking to hazard a swift descent upon him, but anon a musket shot from the door struck the pikeman behind me, and he lurched against me, so that I could barely keep my feet. Another of my good Irishmen stooped to lift the pike that had fallen from his comrade's hand, and in defending him I crossed the guard of Rory Mac Shane, and gave him the point of my sword in the throat at the opening of his tunic. He skipped back in time to escape mortal hurt, and at that instant a man one step below him lunged fiercely, and thrust the point of his long spear through the calf of my right leg. Mac Shane was roaring with pain, and upon his stepping back to staunch his wound, his followers drew away, giving us some respite, whereby I was able to make a shift to bind my handkerchief about my hurt. As I bent down I staggered and would have fallen but for the sustaining arm of Stubbs. My faintness filled me with dread; I would have given a world for a cup of water; and I sickened with dismay as I thought of what the end might be if my draining blood left me no

strength to endure the fight.

[image]

*I CROSSED THE GUARD OF RORY MAC SHANE, AND GAVE HIM
THE POINT OF MY SWORD*

The intermission was brief. Mac Shane gathered a little group about him, and setting up before them a portion of one of their rafts, they charged with the utmost impetuosity up the stairs. We were driven before them, hacking vainly at their shield. I cried to the man above me to stand by the door at the first landing; then bidding Stubbs run for his life, I made one more desperate onslaught upon the raft, and limping up with what speed I might, I slammed the door in the face of the enemy, and fell in much pain and giddiness upon the floor.

There coming out of my swoon I found my lady kneeling beside me, holding a cup from which she had poured wine between my lips. By the light of a candle which Stubbs had kindled I saw her face, ashy pale, but bending upon me so sweetly compassionate a look as shed upon my spirit abundant solace for my pain. I asked if all was well, and heard with no little amazement that an hour had gone since I shut-to the door, which the enemy had refrained as yet from anyways assaulting. I conjectured that they were biding their time till morning illumined the scene, being in no dubiety of the ultimate act, since they had us caged like rats in a trap. Indeed, they might wait for famine to vanquish us, unless perchance they had some dread of the return of Kedagh O'Hagan. That we could resist them long had no hope at all, for the upper doors might be forced more easily than the great door below, and we should be pressed back to the roof, where, overpowered by their greater numbers, we must succumb. It seemed that my eyes were the index to my thoughts, for looking earnestly upon me, the lady said—

[image]

I FOUND MY LADY KNEELING BESIDE ME, HOLDING A CUP

"Good sir, you shall suffer no more for me. 'Tis not meet that a stranger lose his life in so poor a cause."

"Nay, madam," said I, "the cause is good, and the stranger not so strange neither. Besides, what will you do?"

"I will purchase your safety by yielding of the castle," said she.

"And Rory Mac Shane?" I hinted.

She winced a little, and a shudder ran through her.

"There is always the lake," she said in a whisper.

"O that I had a troop of Hilary Rawdon's men, or Toby Caulfeild's, or any other my companions?" I groaned out, as the meaning of her words smote upon my perception. And then, to ease the time, she questioned me of those friends I had mentioned; and as we talked of matchless doings by land and sea, beguiling thus our anxious spirits, the dawn crept upon us, and the sweet descant of a lark's song floated in at the open window.

"Hark, hark, the lark at heaven's gate sings," I said, using Will Shakespeare's words. "Methinks that warble is of good augury for us."

And as I rose stiffly to my feet, I heard faintly through the door the clash and rumble of armed men stirring below.

"Get you upon the roof, mistress," I said hastily, taking my sword, and though I spoke masterfully, in a manner that had angered her before, she made no opposition, but flitted away, turning at the bend of the stair to give me a last look, mute but eloquent.

I dispatched all the men but three to the roof, bidding them hold the trap open for the final retreat. Hardly were they gone when there resounded a shattering blow upon the door. With my three men I stood upon the stairway, commending myself to God, and presently the door fell in before the redoubled assaults of a ram which the enemy had contrived to make, and there burst upon us Rory Mac Shane and a cluster of his minions. They were beset by so fierce a hail of stones from above that they gave back, but returned directly, bearing the shield of wood which we had aforesaid proved invulnerable. Little by little the vehemency of their onset drove us back from one step to another. One of my Irishmen gasped out his life as a musket shot channelled his lungs. I heard my good Stubbs groan, and knew by and by that a dart had transfixed his arm. In that extremity I looked for Sergeant Death to lay his peremptory arrest upon me; but on a sudden, from above, I heard my lady's voice cry with a ringing gladness that help was at hand. Whether the adversary understood her words I know not, but their import was not to be mistaken. Their fierce shouts sank to a sudden stillness; their ascent was stayed; and from below there rose the cries of men stricken with astonishment and fear. And as our near opponents halted in the pause of irresolution, I took a leap, and lighting full upon their wooden shield, dashed it and the men beneath pell-mell to the landing. And Rory Mac Shane, casting up his arms when he found himself staggering backward, bared his great breast to the unchecked thrust of my sword, which passing clean through him bored a passage for his soul.

VIII

"How now, my bully rook!" sang a well-remembered bluff voice in my ear some while after, for my ill-bound wound had bled afresh, and I had lain as one dead. "What! hast cheated man's last enemy yet once again?"

[image]

"HOW NOW, MY BULLY ROOK!"

And lifting my eyes I beheld the round ruby countenance of my comrade Toby Caulfeild, that commanded a troop of horse in the army of the Lord Deputy.

"All's well?" I asked him feebly.

"All's well that ends well," said he, "though I misdoubt the end's not yet."

"My Lady Sheila?" I said.

"Ah yes, I have heard the name," said he drily. "For a good hour you have done nothing but prattle of Sheilas and Hebes, and Hercules and roarers, mingling Christian and heathen in such sort that my very ears blushed to hear you."

"What is done?" said I.

"Sundry things that cannot be undone," said he, "namely, many ruffians sent to their account, many more so slashed and carved that all the surgeons in Christendom could not make of them aught but patchwork. We came in time to finish your work, my Chris, but only just in time."

"I heard the lark singing," said I, wandering somewhat in my wits.

"And shall again," said he; "but indeed I know a song worthy two of that, and that was carolled by the rosy lips of a most enchanting damsel. Hark! I hear it even now."

And I too heard the low, sweet music of my lady's voice, trolling a ditty in a chamber not far away. And there broke into it the loud, rough utterance of a man, speaking words in the Irish tongue, and the song ceased.

"What rude unmannerly lubber——" I was beginning, but Toby checked me.

"Tush! a father stands on no ceremony with his child," he said.

"Her father!" said I.

"Ay, her father, Kedagh O'Hagan, the arrantest rebel and the jolliest old swasher that ever 'scaped hanging. Hark while I tell you. We were in full cry after the O'Neill when a tatterdemalion kerne came hot-foot after us, bearing a letter very fairly writ but somewhat indictable in the article of spelling, addressed to our general; the which perusing, he read a very painful threat to hang you up if

O'Hagan should suffer so much as the clipping of a hair. He twitched his brows—you know his way—and said that having fallen into the hands of some apparent termagant or vixenish shrew you must e'en abide his leisure, swearing roundly that Christopher Rudd's head was nought in comparison with the rascal O'Neill.

"Well, it chanced some days after that we snared this Kedagh O'Hagan in our toils, and our general, who loves you heartily, gave him into my hands and bade him bring me to his lair, charging me to hang him in his own courtyard if you had been diminished by the paring of a nail. Last night, as we rode over yond hills, we saw a great way off two red fires descend as from the sky, and kindle their image in a space of water beneath. The sight put O'Hagan into a fret and fume, he declaring the lights portended some menace to his castle. We made all the speed we could, but what with the rough pathless hills and the villainous reechy fens, we had to go so far about that 'twas morning ere we came to the place. And as we issued forth of the wood yonder we saw the roof filled with women, of whom one at sight of us waved a handkercher as if to say 'Haste! haste!' Coming to the water's edge, and finding no craft to ferry us across, we swam our horses, and some of us mounted the wall by ladders we saw hooked there for our conveniency, and so fell upon the pack of howling Irishmen in the courtyard and about the door. And when we had done our work, and the old man rushed panting up the stairs, raging for his daughter, he found her here with your head in her lap, dropping salt tears of happiness."

I pressed his hand and thanked him for the service he had done me.

"Well, lad, well, 'tis nought," said he. "Come now, your tale. I must hear about this pickle you fell into, and all the process of your adventures."

I told him how I had been embogged, and brought hither to the castle, and how I had borne my part in defending it against the desperadoes; but I said no whit of my escape by diving, nor of my return. When I came to the end of my brief relation, Toby regarded me very whimsically.

"So, so, my Chris," he said, "you deem your old friend Toby to be unworthy of your confidence. Why, man, I knew all that, and a great deal more; for I took the pains, when the damsel had related all to her father in a torrent of Irishry—the which methinks hath its melodies—I took the pains, I say, to persuade her to rehearse the same in English, which she did with a pretty smack of her tongue that pleased me mightily. She showed me the window whence you made your monstrous dive, waxed eloquent upon your chivalry in coming back to defend her, called you her noble captain, and, in short, so worked upon my inflammable heart that it pricked and stung with jealousy, and I wished I had been in your room."

Hereupon our converse was broken off by the entrance of the maiden herself, leading by the hand a tall old man of a majestic and warlike presence. She

brought him to my bedside, and spoke softly for his ear alone; and he thanked me with a noble grace and courtesy, and offered me the hospitality of his castle until my wound should be thoroughly healed.

When they had departed, Toby Caulfeild heaved a windy sigh.

"Good lack, I envy thee, Chris!" he said. "Never a maiden looked on me with such adorable eyes."

"I did not mark her eyes," said I.

"No, you had eyes for the old man alone," said he. "I warrant she will look on me otherwise when I go hence, for the general charged me, if all was well with you, to convey the prisoner straightly back to camp. What am I to tell him of you, Chris?"

"It needs not that you tell him anything," I answered. "I shall come with you."

"Tush, man, 'twill be a month ere you can sit a horse in any comfort," said he. "I know that, though I am no leech. And something whispers me that your fighting days are over. Never again shall we outface the murderous cannon together, never again mount side by side into the deadly breach. Alack, old lad, and wellaway!"

"You talk a deal of nonsensical nothing, Toby," said I. "My organs are sound enough; shall I cease to bear arms for a paltry poke i' the leg?"

"Ah, lad, I doubt your organs be not so sound as you suppose;" and saying this he sighed again, and smiled whimsically when I asked him if I had unawares been wounded in another part. "Time will show," said he. "Now I must get me to horse, though I dread the lady's anger when I tell her I must take her father hence."

But after some time he came back in great cheerfulness of spirit.

"She received me sweetly," he said, "avowed 'twas hard for a daughter to part from her father, but I must do my duty; said she had confidence in the courtesy of English gentlemen and knew we should treat her father well; assured me that you should have all good care and tendance, and thanked Heaven that Master Rudd had so true a friend. Then she smiled bewitchingly upon me, gave me her hand, and looked as though the greatest pleasure in life I could do her was to turn my back and hie me away. What will the Queen say, Chris?"

He laughed heartily at my bewilderment upon this question, then sighed again, shook my hand mournfully, and so departed.

It needs not to tell of those few weeks I spent in sickness on my couch, yet weeks of bliss and unimaginable contentment. My lady spent the greater part of every day with me, bringing me confections made by her own fair hands, smoothing my pillow, tending me with kind ministrations, reading to me prettily out of her books, and hanging upon my lips when I related, as she bade me,

somewhat of my adventures. One day, when reading out of Master Spenser's book, she faltered at those lines—

"Where they do feed on Nectar heavenly-wise,
With Hercules and Hebe and the rest,"

and with a pretty blush she listened as I told her those enchanting fables of the antique world.

"And I was jealous of Hebe!" she said.

"That canker-worm, that monster, Jealousy!" I quoted from the same poem. "But why jealous of Hebe, mistress?" I asked.

"Because I was a witless, silly child," she said. "Jealous of a goddess, indeed! But I knew not then she was a goddess."

"You thought she was a maiden like yourself?" I said.

"Not like myself," she said, "but fairer."

"Was there ever fairer?" said I, under my breath.

"Tell me, are there many pretty ladies at your Queen's Court?" she said.

I feigned to consider deeply, and rehearsed the names of some known to me, praising this one and that, and marking how her breath came and went.

"But no one durst say a good word of any in the hearing of the Queen," said I. "She must ever be the fairest, the wittiest, the best proportioned, the most nobly endowed both in body and mind. Do you know, mistress, the Queen hath banished and even cast into prison many a man that has dared to wed one of her ladies?"

"Is she so unkind?" she said.

"And when Toby Caulfeild was leaving me he said, 'What will the Queen say, Chris?' and my doltish pate did not understand him."

"Why, that is simple," she said. "He meant that the Queen would be sore grieved at hearing of your hurt. With her own hand she wrote, 'Thy loving sovereign.'"

"She will love me no more when she knows that I love thee," said I, laying my hand upon hers.

She let it rest so for a little, and her cheeks went from red to pale, and from pale to red again. Then her hand stole from mine, and clasped the other upon her lap.

"Ay, none but thee," I said, seeking her eyes beneath the covert of their lids. I breathed her name. I reached out my hand and gently unclasped her twining fingers, and with a lift of the eyes she gave me my answer.

"Let the Queen say what she will!" I cried in my joy. "There is a little place in our south country, Sheila, within sound of the sea, in a fair forest, near soft-

running brooks. I would not exchange it for a king's palace. Good-bye the Camp, good-bye the pomp and glitter of the Court. There will we nest ourselves, my sweet, away from the noise and racket of the world."

Toby Caulfeild was approved a true prophet. My fighting days were done. We took up our abode, Sheila and I, on my little manor, out of the current of war and intrigue, untouched by the discords that rent England asunder when the great Queen had gone to her rest. I never saw the Queen again after that Christmas when she goaded me to fight; what she would have said on hearing that I had wed an Irish maiden without her royal consent could only be guessed. When I returned with my bride from Ireland, the Queen was deep sunk in a lethargy, and the joys and sorrows of mortality were beyond her ken.

[image]

tailpiece to Fifth Part

Postscript

My grandfather took his bride home in the summer of the year 1603, and there they lived in great happiness and contentment, rarely stirring abroad save to make brief and sudden visits to London and to their many friends. My father, their sole child, was born in October of the year 1604, and when he came to the age of eleven, he was sent to the school at Winchester, whence in due order he proceeded to the New College at Oxford.

All these years did my grandfather hold himself aloof from the Court, being much troubled in his mind about the foolish and heady courses of King James. My lady grandmother told me, I remember, how that on the day when he had news of the beheading of his old captain Sir Walter Raleigh, he shut himself up in his chamber, and for very sorrow would neither see nor speak with any of his household. And methinks I hear still his full round voice rehearsing to me the famous verses which Sir Walter wrote, the night before his death, in the Bible of the Dean of Westminster. "He lived and died a gentleman, boy," said he to

me; "and if you would know the true signification of that word 'gentleman,' read Castillo's *Book of the Courtier*, in Mr. Hoby's translation, though in truth you will find all and more in the 15th Psalm."

In the summer of the year 1623 there came to him a gentleman post-haste from London, bearing a letter from a very great person bidding him journey without delay to Westminster. Being beholden to the writer, he must needs comply, though apprehensive of trouble in his quiet life. And after two days a messenger brought from him a letter wherein he wrote that he had been commanded to cross over to France, and ride with all imaginable speed into Spain, on an errand of great moment. My grandmother was sorely disquieted at this news, more especially because he told her no more, nor indeed did she learn the cause of his going until he returned in time to keep my father's birthday.

It was on this wise. There had been talk for many years of a marriage between the Infanta Maria, daughter of King Philip IV of Spain, and our Prince Charles (now King, though a prisoner), a match very little to the liking of our English people. But King James hoped by this alliance to aid the cause of his son-in-law the Elector Palatine, and he carried the business so far as that nothing was wanting except the Pope's dispensation, whereby alone could a Catholic princess wed with a heretic.

Now the Prince of Wales, at that time three and twenty years of age, was a thoughtless unsteady youth, deserving well the fond name of Baby Charles bestowed upon him by his doting father. In consort with his boon friend the Marquis (afterwards Duke) of Buckingham, he conceived the lunatic fancy of going himself to Madrid, with the intent to hasten the match, and woo the Princess in person. Wherefore in February of that year the two headstrong young men, disguised with false beards, and calling themselves Tom and John Smith, set forth from Newhall, crossed the sea from Dover, and rode through France into Spain, where they were received, having thrown off their disguise, with due honour. But, being light-minded, they ran foul of the stiff ceremoniousness of the Spanish Court and gave deep offence, the Prince by his levity, the Marquis by his insolency. It was deemed fit that the Infanta should be approached only with the forms of State; yet the Prince, seeing her walk alone in a garden, leapt over the wall and made love to her, whereat she screamed and fled from this too ardent wooing. The Spaniards, moreover, held it unseemly that the Marquis, a subject, sat in his dressing-gown at the Prince's table, turned his back upon him in public places, and bent himself forward to stare unmannerly at the Infanta. And the Marquis was continually at odds with Olivarez, the Spanish minister, used him haughtily, and browbeat him without measure whether in word or deed. To be brief, they played the fool.

In the summer, when a month had gone by without any word arriving

from the Prince, who had been wont before to write often to his father, King James, then afflicted with the gout, and sick also in mind, conceived that his dear Baby Charles stood in peril of captivity, and went about wringing his hands, and crying with tears that his only sweet son would never see his old dear dad again. Whereupon the great person aforesaid resolved to send some staid and discreet person privily to Madrid to have an eye upon the Prince, and to bring him away, even by kidnapping, if he were in truth menaced by any danger. And bethinking him of my grandfather, and how he had acquitted himself well in many divers adventures, and moreover had had dealings with the Spaniards, he sent for him and dispatched him forth on that errand.

As it fell out, my grandfather had his pains for nought. The Prince, with that deceitfulness which has brought his present woes upon him, having made promises which he knew he could never perform, departed from Madrid, leaving, as the custom with royal persons is, a proxy to wed the Infanta, ten days after the Pope's dispensation should come to hand, although he was in truth already minded to break off the match. Upon his return, the great person acquainted King James with what he had done, and the King sent for my grandfather, and blessed him with many tears, and dubbed him knight.

Thereafter Sir Christopher dwelt only in the country, beholding with troubled eyes the headlong gait of Baby Charles after that he became King.

In the year 1624 my father, having proceeded Master of Arts at Oxford, became parson of a parish in Wiltshire, and wedded the daughter of a neighbour gentleman, and in the next year I was born. When I was sixteen, and a scholar of Winchester, my grandfather related to me the passages of his life which I have set forth in these writings. Five years afterward, when the Rebellion was at its height, and my father held obstinately for the King, he was haled before the Committee of Sequestration, and charged in that he had incited his parishioners to attend the King's rendezvous at Austin's Cross and also helped the royal garrison at Longford Castle. By this Committee being ejected from his living, he returned to his father's house, and there abode. And in the next year, on November 15, the very day when King Charles crept into Carisbrooke Castle, my grandfather died, to the sorrow of us who had the chiefest cause to love him, and of the friends and neighbours among whom he had lived in all honour and righteousness.

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