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Harry Collingwood

"The Cruise of the Nonsuch Buccaneer"

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## Chapter One.

### How George Saint Leger returned from foreign parts.

The time was mid-afternoon, the date was January the 9th, in the year of our Lord 1569; and the good town of Plymouth was basking in the hazy sunlight and mild temperature of one of those delightful days that occasionally visit the metropolis of the West Country, even in mid-winter, under the beneficent influence of the Gulf Stream combined with a soft but enduring breeze from the south-south-east charged with warm air from the Saharan desert and the Mediterranean.

So mild and genial was the weather that certain lads, imbued with that spirit of lawlessness and adventure which seems inherent in the nature of the young Briton, had conspired together to defy the authority of their schoolmaster by playing truant from afternoon school and going to bathe in Firestone Bay. And it was while these lads were dressing, after revelling in their stolen enjoyment, that their attention was attracted by the appearance of a tall ship gliding up the Sound before the soft breathing of the languid breeze.

That she was a foreign-going ship was evident at a glance, first from her size, and, secondly, from the whiteness of her canvas, bleached by long exposure to a southern sun; and as she drew nearer, the display of flags and pennons which she made, and the sounds of trumpet, fife, hautboy, and drum which floated down the wind from her seemed to indicate that her captain regarded his safe arrival in English waters as something in the nature of a triumph.

By the time that she had arrived abreast of Picklecombe Point the bathers had completely resumed their clothing and, having climbed to the highest point within easy reach, now stood interestedly watching the slow approach of the ship, her progress under the impulse of the gentle breeze being greatly retarded by the ebb tide. Speculation was rife among the little group of boys upon the question of the ship's identity, some maintaining that she must necessarily be a Plymouther, otherwise what was she doing there, while others, for no very clearly denned reason, expressed the contrary opinion.

At length one of the party who had been intently regarding the craft for several minutes, suddenly flung his cap into the air, caught it as it fell, and exclaimed excitedly as he replaced it on his head:

"I know her, I du; 'tis my Uncle Marshall's *Bonaventure*, whoam from the Mediterranean and Spain; I'm off to tell my uncle. 'Twas only yesterday that I heard him say he'd give a noble to know that the *Bonaventure* had escaped the Spaniards; and a noble will pay me well for the flogging that I shall get from old Sir John, if Uncle Richard tells him that I played truant to go bathing. But I don't believe he will; he'll be so mighty pleased to hear about the *Bonaventure* that he'll forget to ask how I come to be to Firestone Bay instead of to schule."

And the exultant lad dashed away toward Stonehouse, accompanied by his companions, each of whom was instantly ready to help with suggestions as to the spending of the prospective noble.

The historian of the period has omitted to record whether that worthy, Mr Richard Marshall, one of the most thriving merchants of Plymouth, was as good as his word in the matter of the promised noble; but probably he was, for shortly after the arrival of his nephew with the momentous news, the good man emerged from his house, smiling and rubbing his hands with satisfaction, and made the best of his way to the wharf in Stonehouse Pool, alongside which he knew that the *Bonaventure* would moor, and was there speedily joined by quite a little crowd of other people who were all more or less intimately interested in the ship and her crew, and who had been brought to the spot by the rapid spread of the news that the *Bonaventure* was approaching.

To the impatient watchers it seemed an age before the ship hove in sight at the mouth of the Pool. At length,

however, as the sun dipped behind the wooded slopes across the water toward Millbrook, a ship's spritsail and sprit topsail, with a long pennon streaming from the head of the mast which supported the latter, crept slowly into view beyond Devil's Point, to the accompaniment of a general shout of "There a be!" from the waiting crowd, and a minute later the entire ship stood revealed, heading up the Pool under all sail, to the impulse of the dying breeze which was by this time so faint that the white canvas of the approaching craft scarcely strained at all upon its sheets and yards.

For the period, the *Bonaventure* was a ship of considerable size, her registered measurement being one hundred and twenty-seven tons. She was practically new, the voyage which she was now completing being only her second. Like other ships of her size and time, she was very beamy, with rounded sides that tumbled home to a degree that in these days would be regarded as preposterous. She carried the usual fore and after castles, the latter surmounting the after extremity of her lofty poop. She was rigged with three masts in addition to the short spar which reared itself from the outer extremity of her bowsprit, and upon which the sprit topsail was set, the fore and main masts spreading courses, topsails, and—what was then quite an innovation—topgallant sails, while the mizen spread a lateen-shaped sail stretched along a sloping yard suspended just beneath the top, in the position occupied in these days by the cross-jack. She was armed with twenty-two cannon of various sizes and descriptions, and she mustered a crew of fifty-six men and boys, all told. Her hull was painted a rich orange-brown colour down to a little above the water-line, beneath which ran a narrow black stripe right round her hull, dividing the brown colour of her topsides from her white-painted bottom which, by the way, was now almost hidden by a rank growth of green weed. She carried one large poop lantern, and displayed from her flagstaff the red cross of Saint George, while from her fore and main topgallant-mastheads, from the peak of her mizen, and from the head of her sprit-topmast lazily waved other flags and pennons. As she swung into view round Devil's Point the blare of trumpets and the roll of drums reached the ears of the crowd which awaited her arrival; but these sounds presently ceased as her crew proceeded to brail up and furl sail after sail; and some ten minutes later, scarcely stemming the outgoing tide, she drifted slowly in toward her berth alongside the wharf. Ropes were thrown, great hawsers were hauled ashore and made fast to sturdy bollards, fenders were dropped overside, and the *Bonaventure* was very smartly secured abreast the warehouse which was destined to receive her cargo.

Then, when the ship had been securely moored, fore and aft, her gangway was thrown open, a gang-plank was run out from the deck to the wharf, and Mr Richard Marshall, her owner, stepped on board and advanced with outstretched hand toward a short, stout, grey-haired man who had hitherto occupied a conspicuous position on the poop, but who now descended the poop ladder with some difficulty and hobbled towards the gangway.

The contrast between the two men was great in every way, except perhaps in the matter of age, for both were on the shady side of fifty; but while one of them, Mr Richard Marshall, merchant and shipowner, to wit, was still hale and hearty, carrying himself as straight and upright as though he were still in the prime of early manhood, the other, who was none other than John Burroughs, the captain of the *Bonaventure*, moved stiffly and limped painfully as a result of many wounds received during his forty years of seafaring life, coupled with a rapidly increasing tendency to suffer from severe attacks of rheumatism. And they differed in dress as greatly as in their personal appearance; for while the merchant was soberly if not somewhat sombrely garbed in dark brown broadcloth, with a soft, broad-brimmed felt hat to match, the captain (in rank defiance of the sumptuary laws then existing) sported trunk hosen of pale pink satin, a richly embroidered and padded satin doublet of the same hue, confined at the waist by a belt of green satin heavily brodered with gold thread, from which depended on one side a long rapier and on the other a wicked-looking Venetian dagger with jewelled hilt and sheath, while, surmounting his grizzled and rather scanty locks, he wore, jauntily set on one side, a Venetian cap of green velvet adorned with a large gold and cameo brooch which secured a long green feather drooping gracefully over the wearer's left shoulder. But let not the unsophisticated reader imagine, in the innocence of his heart, that the garb above described was that usually affected by mariners of the Elizabethan period, while at sea. It was not. But they frequently displayed a weakness for showy dress while in port, and especially when about to go ashore for the first time after the termination of a voyage.

"Welcome home again, Cap'n John," exclaimed Marshall, grasping the hand of the sailor and wringing it so heartily that poor Burroughs winced at the pain of his rheumatism-racked wrist and shoulder. "I am glad to see you safely back, for I was beginning to feel a bit uneasy lest the King of Spain had caught you in his embargo."

"Iss, fegs; and so mun very nearly did," answered the captain; "indeed, if it hadn't ha' been for young Garge Saint Leger—who, bein' out of his time, I've made pilot in place of poor Matthews, who was killed in a bout wi' the Barbary rovers on our outward voyage—he'd ha' had us, sure as pigs baint nightingales. But Garge have got the fiend's own gift for tongues and languages, and the night avore we sailed he happened to be ashore lookin' round Santander, and while he were standin' on one side of a pillar in a church he heard two Spanishers on t'other side of that there same pillar talkin' about the embargo that King Philip was goin' to declare again' the English at midnight that very night as ever was. Like a good boy, Garge waited until the two Spanishers had left the church, and then comed straight down aboard and told me what he'd heard. At first I didn't put very much faith in the yarn, I'll own to't, but that there Garge so pestered and worried me that at last I let mun have mun's way; and ten minutes afore midnight the *Bonaventure* was under way and standin' out o' the harbour. We managed to get out without bein' fired upon by the batteries. But if you'll believe me, sir, they sent a galley out a'ter us, and if it hadn't ha' happened that the wind was blowin' fresh from about west, and a nasty lump of a beam sea runnin', dang my ugly buttocks if that galley wouldn't ha' had us! But the galley rolled so heavy that they couldn't use their oars to advantage, while the *Bonaventure* is so fast as any dolphin with a beam wind and enough of it to make us furl our topgallants; so we got away."

"And a very smart piece of work, too, apparently," said Mr Marshall. "I must not forget to thank George Saint Leger for his share in it. Has your voyage been a success, Captain?"

"So, so; I don't think you'll find much to complain about when we comes to go into the figures," answered Burroughs. "We had a bit of a brush wi' the rovers, who comed out against us in three ships, during our outward voyage, but we beat 'em off wi' the loss of only one man—poor Matthews, as I mentioned just now—since when we've had no call to fire a single shot."

"Excellent, excellent!" commented the merchant, rubbing his hands. "Of course I am very sorry to learn that Matthews was slain; but these things will happen at sea from time to time. Well, to-morrow we will have the hatches off and begin discharging. While that is proceeding I must consider what next to do with the ship; for it will be useless to think of further trade with the Mediterranean while the Spanish embargo lasts, and Heaven only knows how long that will be."

"Ay," assented Burroughs. "'Tis a pity that her Grace up to Whitehall can't make up her mind one way or t'other about this here Spanish business; whether she'll be friends wi' Philip, or will fight mun. For all this here shilly-shallyin', first one way and then t'other, be terrible upsettin' to folks like we. But there, what be I grumblin' about? 'Twont make a mort o' difference to me, because I've made up my mind as it's time for me to knock off the sea and settle down snug and comfortable ashore for the rest of my days. I be that bad wi' the rheumatics that I've got to get the cabin boy to help me put on my clothes, and when there be a sea runnin' and the ship do roll a bit I can't sleep for the pain in my j'int's. So, Mr Marshall, I may 's well give 'e notice, here and now, so's you'll ha' plenty of time to look about 'e for another cap'n."

"Dear me, dear me! I am very sorry to hear that, Cap'n," exclaimed Mr Marshall. "But," he continued, "ever since the declaration of the embargo I have been thinking what I would do with the *Bonaventure* in the event of her escaping from the Spaniards, and I had almost decided to lay her up until the dispute is settled one way or the other. Now if you stay ashore until that time arrives, and take care of yourself, perhaps you will find yourself quite able to take command of her again when she next goes to sea."

"No," asserted Burroughs decisively; "I ha' made up my mind, and I'll stick to it. The sea's no place for a man afflicted as I be. Besides, I ha' done very well in the matter o' they private ventures that you've allowed me to engage in; there's a very tidy sum o' money standin' to my credit in Exeter Bank, and there's neither chick nor child to use it a'ter I be gone, so I might so well enjoy it and be comfortable for the rest o' my days, and at the same time make way for a younger man. Now, there be Garge," he continued, lowering his tone. "'Tis true that he be but a lad; but he'm a sailor to the tips of his fingers; he'm so good a seaman and navigator as I be; he've a-got coolness and courage when they be most needed; he knoweth how to handle a crew; he've got the gift of tongues; and—he'm a gentleman, which is a danged sight more than I be. You might do a mort worse, Mr Marshall, than give he the *Bonaventure* when next you sends her to sea."

"H'm! do you really think so?" returned the merchant. "He is very young, you know, Captain; too young, I think, to bear the responsibility attending the command of such a ship as the *Bonaventure*. But—well, I will think it over. Your recommendation of course will carry very great weight with me."

"Ay, and so't ought to," retorted the blunt-spoken old skipper. "I've served you now a matter of over thirty years, and you've never yet had to find fault wi' my judgment. And you won't find it wrong either in that there matter o' Garge."

After which the subject was dropped, and the pair proceeded to the discussion of various matters which have no bearing upon the present history.

Meanwhile, during the progress of the above-recorded conversation, the crew, having completed the mooring of the ship, proceeded to furl the sails which had been merely hauled down or clewed up as the craft approached the wharf; and when this job had been performed to the satisfaction of a tall, strapping young fellow who stood upon the poop supervising operations, the mariners laid down from aloft and, the business of the ship being over for the day, were dismissed from duty. As every man aboard the *Bonaventure* happened to call Plymouth "home," this meant on their part a general swarming ashore to join the relatives and friends who patiently awaited them on the wharf; whereupon the little crowd quickly melted away.

Then, and not until then, the tall, strapping young fellow upon the poop—familiarly referred to by Captain Burroughs as "Garge," and henceforth to be known to us as George Saint Leger and the hero of the moving story which the writer proposes to set forth in the following pages—descended to the main deck, uttered a word or two of greeting and caution to the two sturdy ship-keepers who had already come on board to take care of ship and cargo during the absence of the crew, and with quick, springy step, strode to the gang-plank, and so to the wharf, whither the captain, in Mr Marshall's company, had preceded him.

As he strode along the wharf, with that slight suggestion of a roll in his gait which marks the man whose feet have been long accustomed to the feel of a heaving deck, he cast a quick, eager, recognising glance at the varied features of the scene around him, his somewhat striking countenance lighting up as he noted the familiar details of the long line of quaint warehouses which bordered the wharf, the coasters which were moored ahead and astern of the *Bonaventure*, the fishing craft grounded upon the mud higher up the creek, the well remembered houses of various friends dotted about here and there, the heights of Mount Edgumbe shadowy and mysterious in the deepening twilight, and the slopes of Mount Wise across the water; and a joyous smile irradiated his features as his gaze settled upon a small but elegant cottage, of the kind now known as a bungalow, standing in the midst of a large, beautifully kept garden, situated upon the very extremity of the Mount and commanding an uninterrupted view of the Sound. For in that cottage, from three windows of which beamed welcoming lights, he knew that his mother, and perchance his elder brother Hubert, awaited his coming. For a moment he paused, gazing lovingly at the lights, then, striding on again, he quickly reached the end of the wharf and, hurrying down the ferry steps, sprang into a boat which he found lying alongside.

"So you'm back again all safe, Mr Garge, sir," exclaimed the occupant of the boat as he threw out an oar to bear the craft off from the wharf wall, while young Saint Leger seated himself in the stern sheets. "I been here waitin' for 'e for the last hour or more. The mistress seed the ship a comin' in, and knowed her, and her says to me—'Tom, the *Bonaventure* be whoam again. Now, you go down and take the boat and go across to the wharf, for Master Garge 'll be in a hurry to come over, and maybe the wherry won't be there just when he's ready to come; so you go over and wait for un.' And here I be. Welcome home again, sir."

"Thanks, Tom," answered Saint Leger, "I did not recognise you for the moment. And how is my mother?"

"She's just about as well as can be reasonably expected, sir, considerin' the way that she's been worritin' about you and Mr Hubert—'specially 'bout you, sir, since the news of the King of Spain's embargo have been made known," answered the man Tom, who was in fact the gardener and general handy man at The Nest, as Mrs Saint Leger's cottage was named.

"Poor dear soul," murmured George; "she will fret herself to death over Hu and me, before all's done, I am afraid. So Captain Hawkins has not yet returned, Tom?"

"Not yet a bain't, sir. But he've only been gone a matter o' fifteen months; and 'tis only a year since mun sailed from the Guinea coast for the Indies, so 'tis a bit early yet to be expectin' mun back. When he and Franky Drake du get over there a spoilin' the Egyptians, as one might say, there be no knowin' how long they'll stay there. I don't look to see 'em back till they'm able to come wi' their ships loaded wi' Spanish gould; and it'll take a mort o' time to vind six shiploads o' gould," returned Tom.

"And has no news of the expedition been received since its arrival on the Spanish Main?" asked George.

"Not as I've heard of, sir," answered Tom. "The last news of 'em was that they'd sailed from the Guinea coast some time about the end of January; and how that comed I don't know. But I expect 'tis true, because Madam got it from Madam Hawkins, who comed over expressly to tell her."

"Ah, well, I suppose we shall hear in God's good time," commented George. "Back water with your starboard oar, Tom, and pull larboard, or you'll smash in the bows of the boat against the steps. So! way enough. Haul her to and let me get out. If I am not mistaken there is my mother waiting for me under the verandah. Thanks! Good night, Tom, and put that in your pocket for luck."

So saying the young man handed Tom a ducat, and sprang out of the boat, up the landing steps, and made his way rapidly up the steep garden path toward the house, beneath the verandah of which a female figure could be dimly seen by the sheen of the lighted windows. As George Saint Leger neared the brow of the slope upon which The Nest was built, this same female figure ran down the verandah steps to meet him, and a moment later he and his mother were locked in each other's arms.

"My boy, my boy!" crooned Mrs Saint Leger as she nestled in her son's embrace and tiptoed up to kiss the lips that sought her own—"welcome home again, a thousand welcomes! I saw the ship while she was yet outside Saint Nicholas Island and, with the help of the perspective glass that you brought me from Genoa, was able to recognise her as the *Bonaventure*. And later, when she rounded the point and entered the Pool, I saw you standing beside Captain Burroughs on the poop, and so knew that all was well with you. Come in, my dear, and let me look at you. Supper is all ready and waiting, and there is a fine big coal fire blazing in the dining-room, for I knew you would feel the air chilly after that of the Mediterranean."

A moment later the pair entered the warm, cosy dining-room, and stood intently regarding each other by the light of a candelabrum which occupied the centre of the handsomely appointed table. And while they stand thus, with their hands upon each other's shoulders, each scrutinising the face of the other, we may seize the opportunity to make the acquaintance of both; for with one of them at least we purpose to participate in many a strange scene and stirring adventure in those western Indies, the wonders and fabulous wealth of which were just beginning to be made known to Englishmen through that redoubtable rover and slaver, Captain John Hawkins.

Mrs Saint Leger was a small, somewhat delicate and fragile-looking woman, just turned forty-six years of age, yet, although people seemed to age a great deal more quickly in those days than in these, and although, as the widow of one sailor and the mother of two others, she had known much anxiety and mental stress, she retained her youthful appearance to a degree that was a constant source of wonder to her many friends. Her form was still as girlish as when Hugh Saint Leger proudly led her to the altar twenty-eight years before we make her acquaintance. Her cheeks were still smooth and round, her violet eyes, deep and tender, were still bright despite the many tears which anxiety for her husband and sons had caused her to shed, and which her bitter grief had evoked when, some seven years earlier, the news had been brought to her of her husband's death while gallantly defending his ship against an attack by Salee pirates. Her golden-brown hair was still richly luxuriant, and only the most rigorous search would have revealed the presence of a silver thread here and there. And lastly, she stood just five feet four inches in her high-heeled shoes, and—in honour of her younger son's safe arrival home—was garbed, in the height of the prevailing mode, in a gown of brown velvet that exactly matched the colour of her hair, with long pointed bodice heavily embroidered with gold thread, voluminous farthingale, long puffed sleeves, ruffed lace collar, lace stomacher, and lace ruffles at her dainty wrists.

George Saint Leger, aged twenty, stood five feet ten inches in his stockings, though he did not look anything like that height, so broad were his shoulders and so robustly built was his frame. He had not yet nearly attained to his full growth, and promised, if he went on as he was going, to become a veritable giant some five or six years hence. He had his mother's eyes and hair—the latter growing in short soft ringlets all over his head—and he inherited a fair share also of his mother's beauty, although in his case it was tempered and made manly by a very square chin, firm, close-set lips, and a certain suggestion of sternness and even fierceness in the steady intent gaze of the eyes. He was garbed, like his captain, in doublet, trunk hose, and cap, but in George's case the garments were made of good serviceable cloth, dyed a deep indigo blue colour, and his cap—which he now held in his hand—was unadorned with either feather or brooch. Also, he wore no weapons of any kind save those with which nature had provided him.

"Egad! it is good to feel your arms round me, little mother, and to find myself in this dear old room again," exclaimed the lad as he gazed down into his mother's loving eyes. "And you—surely you must have discovered the whereabouts of the fount of perpetual youth, for you do not look a day older than when I went away."

"Nonsense, silly boy," returned the delighted little lady as she freed herself from her stalwart son's embrace, "art going to celebrate thy return home by beginning to pay compliments to thy old mother? But, indeed," she continued more seriously, "'tis a wonder that I am not grey-headed, for the anxiety that I have suffered on thy account, George, and that of thy brother Hubert, has scarcely suffered me to know a moment's peace."

"Dear soul alive, I'll warrant that's true," agreed George. "But, mother, you need never be anxious about me, for there's not a better or stauncher ship afloat than the *Bonaventure*, nor one that carries a finer captain and crew. We've held our own in many a stiff bout with weather and the enemy, and can do it again, please God. And as for Hu, I think you need fear as little for him as for me, for with Hawkins as admiral, and Frankie Drake as second in command, with six good ships to back them up, they should be able to sweep the Spanish Main from end to end. It cannot now be very long before one gets news of them, and indeed, I confidently look forward to seeing them come sailing into Plymouth Sound ere long, loaded down with treasure."

"God grant that it may be so," responded Mrs Saint Leger. "Yet how can I help being fearful and anxious when I think of those daring men thousands of miles away from home and kindred, surrounded as it were by enemies, and with nought to keep them but their courage and the strength of their own right arm? And where there is fighting—as fighting there must be when English and Spaniards come face to face—some must be slain, and why not our Hubert among them? For the boy is hot-headed, and brave even to recklessness."

"Ay," assented George, "that's true. But 'tis the brave and reckless ones that stand the best chance in a fight, for their very courage doth but inspire the enemy with terror, so that he turns and flees from them. Besides, our lads are fighting God's battle against bigotry, idolatry, and fiendish cruelty as exemplified in the tortures inflicted upon poor souls in the hellish Inquisition, and 'twould be sinful and a questioning of God's goodness to doubt that He will watch over them who are waging war upon His enemies."

"Yea, indeed, that is true," agreed Mrs Saint Leger. "And yet, so weak is our poor human faith that there are times when my heart is sick with fear as to what may be happening to my dear ones. But here is Lucy with the supper. Draw up and sit down, my son. I'll warrant that the enjoyment of a good roast capon and ale of thy mother's own brewing will be none the less for the sea fare upon which thou hast lived of late."

So mother and son sat down to table again for the first time in many months. And while they ate George regaled his mother with a recital of some of the most moving happenings of the voyage just ended, including, naturally, a detailed account of the brush with Barbary pirates, the death of Matthews, the pilot, and George's own promotion to the post thus rendered vacant; to all of which Mrs Saint Leger listened eagerly, devouring her son with her eyes as he made play with capon and pasty and good nut-brown ale, talking betwixt mouthfuls and eliciting from his absorbed audience of one, now a little exclamation of horror at the tale of some tragic occurrence or narrow escape, and anon a hearty laugh at the recounting of some boyish frolic and escapade in one or another of the foreign cities visited in the course of the voyage. Supper over, they drew their chairs up before the fire and continued their talk, asking and answering questions in that delightfully inconsequent fashion which is possible only between near and dear relatives after a long separation. So the time passed quickly until the hour-glass in the hall marked ten and the maid brought in candles; whereupon, before separating for the night, mother and son knelt down together and rendered heartfelt thanks to God for the safe return of the one wanderer and offered up equally heartfelt petitions for the preservation of the other, as folk were not ashamed to do in those grand old days when belief in God's interest in the welfare of His creatures was a living, virile thing, and when a man's religion was as intimate a part of his daily life as were his meat and drink.

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## Chapter Two.

### How Robert Dyer brought news of disaster.

The following morning found George Saint Leger early astir; for the unloading of the *Bonaventure's* rich cargo was now to begin, and he must be there to superintend and do his share of the work. And be sure that Mr Richard Marshall and his head clerk were also there to take note of each bale and cask and package as it was hoisted out of the hold and carried across the wharf into the yawning doorway of the warehouse; for while the worthy merchant fully trusted those of his servants who had proved themselves to be trustworthy, he held that there was no method of keeping trustworthy servants faithful so efficacious as personal oversight; he maintained that the man who tempted another to dishonesty by throwing opportunities for dishonesty in his way, was as guilty and as much to blame as the one who succumbed to temptation; therefore he kept his own soul and the souls of his employés clean by affording the latter as little occasion as might be for stumbling. Captain Burroughs—his rheumatism more troublesome than ever—was also present, with his hands full of invoices and bills of lading to which he referred from time to time for information in reply to some question from Mr Marshall; and soon the winches began to creak and the main hatch to disgorge its contents, while a crowd of those curious and idle loafers who, like the poor, are always with us, quickly gathered upon the wharf to gape and watch the process of unloading the cargo.

That process was much more deliberately carried out then than it is in the present day of hurry and rush, steam and electricity; therefore it was not until nearly a fortnight had elapsed that the last bale had been hoisted out of the *Bonaventure's* hold and safely stored in Mr Marshall's warehouse. Mr Marshall had definitely announced his intention to lay up the ship until the Spanish embargo should be raised. And it was on that same night that, as George and his mother sat chatting by the fire after supper, the maid Lucy entered the room with the intimation that a strange, foreign-looking man, apparently a sailor, stood without, craving speech with Mistress Saint Leger.

Mrs Saint Leger's apprehensions with regard to the safety of Hubert, her elder son, temporarily allayed by George's optimism, were quick to respond to the slightest hint or suggestion of disaster; the mere mention, therefore, of a man, foreign-looking and of sailorly aspect, seeking speech with her, and especially at such an untimely hour, was

sufficient to re-awaken all her unformed fears into full activity. Her lips blanched and a look of terror leapt into her eyes as she sprang to her feet, regarding the somewhat stolid Lucy as though the latter were some apparition of ill omen.

"A sailor, say you, strange, and foreign-looking?" she gasped. "What for mercy's sake can such a man want with me at this time of night? Did you ask the man his name?"

"No, ma'am, I—I—didn't," stammered the maid, astonished at her mistress's unusual agitation, and afraid that in omitting to make the enquiry she had been guilty of some terrible oversight; "he said—he—"

But at this point George intervened. To him, as to his mother, the circumstance had at once conveyed a suggestion of ominousness, a hint of possible evil tidings. Like his mother, he had risen to his feet as the thought of what this visit might mean dawned upon him. But, unlike Mrs Saint Leger, he was accustomed to act quickly in the presence of sudden alarms, and now he laid his hand reassuringly upon his mother's shoulder, as he said soothingly:

"There, there, sit you down, mother; there's nought to be frightened about, I'll warrant. Sit you down, again; and I'll go out and speak to the fellow. Maybe 'tis but some sneaking, snivelling beggar-man who, believing you to be alone here, hopes to terrify you into giving him a substantial alms."

So saying, with another reassuring pat upon his mother's shoulder, the lad stalked out of the room, pushing the bewildered maid before him, and made his way to the front door, where Mrs Saint Leger, acutely listening, presently heard him in low converse with the stranger. The conversation continued for a full ten minutes, and then Mrs Saint Leger's apprehensions were sharpened by hearing footsteps—her son's and another's—approaching the room in which she sat. A moment later the door was flung open, and George, pale beneath his tan, re-appeared, ushering in a thick-set, broadly-built man of medium height, whose long, unkempt hair and beard, famine-sharpened features, and ragged clothing told an unmistakable tale of privation and suffering.

"Mother," said George—and as he spoke his lips quivered slightly in spite of his utmost efforts to keep them steady—"this man is Robert Dyer of Cawsand, one of the crew of the *Judith*, Captain Drake's ship, just arrived from the Indies, and he brings us bad news—not the worst, thank God," he interjected hurriedly as he noted Mrs Saint Leger's sudden access of pallor—"but bad enough for all that, and it is necessary that you should hear it. The expedition has been a failure, thanks to Spanish treachery; the loss to the English has been terribly heavy, and several of the men are missing."

For a few moments the poor distracted mother strove vainly to speak; then, clutching George's arm tightly, she moaned: "Well, why do you pause, George? Tell me the worst, I pray you. I can bear it. Do not keep me in suspense. Do you wish me to understand that Hubert is killed—or is he among the missing? He must be one or the other, I know, or he would be here now to tell his own story."

"He is a prisoner in the hands of the Spaniards, mother," answered George. "But be of good cheer," he continued, as Mrs Saint Leger staggered like one struck and he sprang to her assistance—"sit you down, mother, and let Dyer here tell us his story. I have only just heard the barest outline of it. Perhaps when we have heard it all it may not seem so bad. And don't you fear for Hubert, dearie; 'tis true that the Spaniards have got him, but they won't dare to hurt him, be you assured of that; and likely enough he will have escaped by this time. Now, Dyer, come to an anchor, man, and tell us all that befell. And while you're talking we'll have some supper prepared for you."

"Well, madam, and Mr Garge, there ain't so very much to tell," answered Dyer, seating himself in the chair which Saint Leger had indicated. "Of course you do both know—all Plymouth knows—that we sailed away from this very port a year ago come the second o' last October. Six ships strong, we was, well manned, and an abundance o' munitions o' war of every kind, even to shore-artillery. And we had Cap'n John Hawkins for our admiral and Frank Drake for our pilot, so what more could a body want?"

"We made a very good passage to the Canary Islands, which was our first roudyvoos; and from there, a'ter we'd wooded and watered afresh, and set up our rigging, we sailed for the Guinea coast. On our way there, avore ever we got so far south as Cape Blanc, we captured a Portingal caravel; pickin' up another of 'em a little way to the nor'ard of Cape Verde. This here last one was called the *Grace a Dios*, she were a very fine new ship of a hunderd and fifty ton—and we kept 'em both because, bein' light-draught ships, the admiral knowed they'd be useful for goin' in over bar on the Coast, where the mouths of the rivers be always shallow.

"Well, in due time—I forget the exact date, now—we arrived on the Coast, and there we stayed for a matter o' three months, huntin' blacks and Portingals; goin' into the rivers in the caravels, landin' parties, attackin' native villages, and makin' prisoners o' all the strongest and most likely-lookin' men and women—with a good sprinklin' o' childer, too—and cuttin' out the Portingal caravels wherever we found 'em. Ah! that work o' boardin' and cuttin' out the Portingals! It was fine and excitin', and suited Cap'n Drake and Mr Saint Leger a sight better than nagur huntin'. They was always the first to come forward for such work, and never was two men so happy as they was when news was brought of a caravel bein' near at hand.

"Three months we stayed on that there terrible Guinea coast, and durin' that time we got together over five hunderd nagurs, besides takin', plunderin', and burnin' more than a dozen caravels. Then, wi' pretty nigh half of our company down wi' fevers and calentures taken on the Coast and in the rivers, we all sailed for the Spanish Main. A matter o' seven weeks it took us to cross to t'other side o' the world, although we had fair winds and fine weather all the way, as is usual on the voyage from Africa to the Indies. Then we arrived at a lovely island called Margarita, one o' the Spaniards' Indian possessions, where I was told they find pearls. Here we found several storehouses crammed with food of all sorts and great casks o' wine intended for distribution among the ports of the Spanish Main; and here our admiral decided to re-victual the fleet. And mun did, too, in spite of the objections o' the Spaniards, who vowed that they had no food to spare. We took from 'em all that we wanted, but we paid for it in good Portingal goold, seein' that

we was no pirates, but good honest traders.

“Then we sailed westward again, past La Guaira and the great wall of mountains that tower aloft behind it far into the deep blue sky. On the third day after leavin’ Margarita we sailed into as snug a little harbour as you’d wish to see. And there we stayed for a matter o’ two months, landin’ our sick and our blacks, clearin’ out our ships’ holds, cleanin’, careenin’, scrapin’, paintin’, overhaulin’, and refittin’ generally, the blacks helpin’ us willin’ly enough when we made ’em understand what we wanted done.

“By the time that we’d a done everything that we wanted to, our sick had got well again—all except four what died in spite of us—and then we put to sea again, coastin’ along the Main and callin’ in here and there to trade our blacks for goold and pearls. But at first the trade weren’t at all good; and bimeby the admiral lost patience wi’ the silly fules and vowed he’d make ’em trade wi’ us, whether they wanted to or no; so we in the *Judith* and another ship were sent round to a place called La Hacha. When we arrived and made to enter, the forts opened fire upon us! So we and t’other ship blockaded the place for five days, sufferin’ nothin’ to go in or come out; and then along come the admiral wi’ the rest o’ the ships, and we got to work in earnest. The shore-artillery and two hunderd soldiers was landed, the batteries was stormed, and we took the town, drivin’ all the Spaniards out of it; and be sure that Cap’n Drake and Mr Saint Leger was among the first to get inside. That was enough for they Spanishers; a’ter that they was ready enough to trade wi’ us; and indeed that same night some of ’em comed back, bringin’ their goold and their pearls with ’em; and avore we left the place we’d parted wi’ no less than two hunderd blacks.

“And so things went on until we’d a sold every black that remained; and by that time we’d got so much goold and so many pearls that the admiral was afeard that if we tried to get more we mid lose all, and accordin’ly, a’ter holdin’ a council o’ war, it was decided to make for whoam, and we bore away up north to get into the Gulf Stream to help us to beat up again’ the easterly winds that do blow always in them parts. But, as it turned out, we couldn’t ha’ done a worse thing. For we’d no sooner weathered Cape Yucatan than there fell upon us two o’ the most awful gales that mortal man can pictur’, pretty nigh all our canvas was blowed clean out of the bolt-ropes, some o’ the ships was dismasted, the sea—well, I don’t know what I can compare it to, unless ’tis to mountains, it runned so high; and as for the poor little *Judith*, ’twas only by the mercy o’ God and Cap’n Drake’s fine seamanship that she didn’t go straight to the bottom. By the time that them there hurricanes was over the ships was not much better nor wrecks, and ’twas useless to think o’ makin’ the v’yage home in ’em in that condition, so our admiral made the signal to bear up and run for San Juan de Ulua. And when we arrived there, if you’ll believe me, madam and Mr Garge, we found no less than twelve big galleons, loaded wi’ goold an’ silver, waitin’ for the rest o’ the Plate fleet and its convoy to sail for Old Spain! And the very next day the ships as was expected arrived off the port and found us English in possession!

“Then there was a pretty to-do, you may take my word for ’t. Some o’ the cap’ns—Mr Saint Leger and Cap’n Drake among ’em, I believe—was for attackin’ the convoy and takin’ the whole o’ the Plate fleet; and, as things turned out, ’twould ha’ been better if we’d done it, for, disabled though our ships were, we could ha’ fought at our anchors and kept the convoy from enterin’ the port. But the admiral wouldn’t hear o’ it; he kept on declarin’ that we was honest traders, and that to capture the Spanish ships ’d be a hact of piracy which would get us into no end o’ trouble to home, and perhaps bring about war betwixt England and Spain; and at last t’others give in to mun and let mun have mun’s own way. Then there was goin’s to an’ fro between our ships and the shore, and I heard say as that the admiral were negotiatin’ wi’ the Viceroy for permission for our ships to stay where they was, and refit; and at last ’twas agreed that we was to be allowed to so do, provided that we didn’t interfere wi’ the Spanish ships.

“That bein’ arranged, the rest of the Plate fleet and the convoy sailed into the harbour and anchored, while we English got to work clearin’ away our wrecked spars, sendin’ down yards, and what not. The *Judith* bein’ a small ship, Cap’n Drake took her in and moored her alongside a wharf upon which we stowed part of our stores and water casks, so ’s to have more room for movin’ about on deck; but as for the rest, they’d to do the best they could while lyin’ off to their anchors. And one of the first things that we did was to transfer all the goold and pearls that we’d collected to the *Jesus*. Three days we laboured hard at the work of refittin’, and then, when most o’ our biggest ships was so completely dismantled that they hadn’t a spar aloft upon which to set a sail, them treacherous Spaniards, carin’ nothin’ for their solemn word and promises, must needs attack us, openin’ fire upon us both from the ships and the forts, while a party o’ soldiers came marchin’ down to the wharf especially to attack us of the *Judith*’s crew. When Cap’n Drake see’d mun comin’ he at once ordered all hands ashore; and while he and Mr Saint Leger and a few more did their best to keep off the soldiers, the rest of us went to work to put the provisions and water back aboard the *Judith*. But we’d only about half done our work when a lot more soldiers comed swarmin’ down, and Cap’n Drake sings out for everybody to get aboard and to cast off the hawsers—for by this time there was nigh upon five hunderd Spaniards attackin’ us, and we could do nothin’ again so many. Seein’ so many soldiers comin’ again us, some of our chaps got a bit frightened and took the cap’n at his word by castin’ off our shore fasts at once, without waitin’ for everybody to get aboard first. The consequence was that when all the hawsers had been let go exceptin’ the quarter rope—which I was tendin’ to—the Cap’n, Mr Saint Leger, and about half a dozen more was still on the wharf while—an



"ONE OF 'EM AIMED A DREADFUL BLOW AT MUN'S HEAD WI' A HEAVY TWO-HANDED SOORD."

*The Cruise of the "Nonsuch."*

p. 31.  
Frontispiece.

off-shore wind happenin' to be blowin' at the time—the ship's head had paid off until 'twas pointing out to sea, while there was about a couple o' fathoms of space atween the ship's quarter and the wharf. I s'pose that seein' this, and that there was only a matter o' seven or eight men to oppose 'em, gived the Spaniards courage to make a rush at the Cap'n and his party; anyway, that's what they did, and for about a couple o' minutes there was a terrible fight on that wharf, in which three or four men went down.

"The next thing I noticed, Mr Garge, were your brother layin' about mun like a very Paladin, fightin' three big Spanish cavaliers single-handed, and, while I watched, one of 'em aimed a dreadful blow at mun's head wi' a heavy two-handed soord. Mr Hubert see'd the blow comin' and put up his soord to guard the head of mun, but the soord broke off clean, close to the hilt, and there were Mr Hubert disarmed. Then the three Spaniards that was fightin' mun rushed in afore Mr Hubert could draw his dagger, seized mun by the arms, and dragged mun away out o' the fight. And while this were happenin' our Cap'n were so busy that I don't believe he ever see'd that Mr Hubert were took prisoner. Then I sang out to mun—'Cap'n Drake,' says I, 'if you don't come aboard this very minute,' says I, 'the ship'll break adrift and go off and leave ye behind.' The Cap'n took a look round, see'd that evrybody else but hisself was either cut down or took prisoner, and, flinging his soord in the face of a man that tried to stop mun, leaped clean off quay, seized the hawser in 's hands as mun jumped, and come aboard that way, hand over hand. Then I let go the hawser and jumped to the helm, and we runned off among t'other ships, where we let go our anchor.

"Now by this time the fight were ragin' most furious everywhere, some of the Spanish havin' got under way and runned our ships aboard. But they didn't gain much by that move, for though they sank three of our ships, we sank four of them and reduced their flag-ship to a mere wreck, while their losses in men must ha' been something fearful. But although we gived 'em such a punishin', we, bein' the weakest, was gettin' the worst o' it; and bimeby, when they took to sendin' fireships down to attack us, the admiral thought 'twas time to make a move, so he signalled that such ships as could get to sea was to do so. Accordin'ly, all that was left of us cut our cables, and made sail as best we could, the *Jesus* leadin' the way, we in the *Judith* goin' next, and the *Minion* comin' last and coverin' our retreat.

"But that didn't end our troubles by any manner o' means, for we'd scarcely got clear of the land when the *Jesus* was found to be so riddled and torn wi' shot that we only just had time to take her crew off of her when down she went, takin' with her all the treasure that we'd gathered together durin' the voyage. Then we parted company wi' the *Minion*, and whether she's afloat, or whether she's gone to the bottom, God only knows, for I hear that she haven't arrived home up to now."

"And when did the *Judith* arrive?" demanded George, when it became evident that Dyer had brought his story to an end.

"Not above two hours agone," answered the man. "We got in a'ter dark, and come to an anchor in the Hamoaze; and so anxious were the cap'n to report that he wouldn't wait till to-morrer, but must needs have a boat lowered and come ashore to see Cap'n William Hawkins to-night. And he bade me walk over here to see madam, give her the news, and say, wi' his dutiful respec's, that if time do permit he will call upon her some time to-morrer, to answer any questions as she may wish to ast him."

"One question which I shall certainly want to ask him will be how it came about that he was so careful to provide for his own safety without making any effort to rescue my son," remarked Mrs Saint Leger, in a low, strained voice.

"Nay, madam, by your leave, you must not ask mun that," answered Dyer. "I, who saw everything, saw that the cap'n could not ha' rescued Mr Hubert, had he tried ever so. He could not ha' saved Mr Hubert, and if he'd been mad



enough to try he'd only ha' been took hisself. Moreover, from what he've a said since 'tis clear to me that he thought Mr Hubert had got safe aboard, or he'd never ha' left mun behind. I knowed that by the grief o' mun when he was first told that Mr Hubert had been took."

"What do you suppose the Spaniards will do with my brother?" impulsively asked George, and could have bitten his tongue out the next moment for his imprudence in asking such a question in his mother's presence. For Dyer was a blunt, plain-spoken, ignorant fellow, without a particle of tact, as young Saint Leger had already seen, and he knew enough of Spanish methods to pretty shrewdly guess what the reply to his question would be. And before he could think of a plan to avert that reply, it came.

"Well, Mr Garge," answered Dyer, "you and I do both know how the Spaniards do usually treat their prisoners. I do reckon they must ha' took a good twenty or thirty o' our men, and I don't doubt but what they'll clap the lot into th' Inquisition first of all. Then they'll burn some of 'em at an *auto-da-fé*; and the rest they'll send to the galleys for life."

"What sayest thou?" screamed Mrs Saint Leger, starting to her feet and wringing her hands as she stared at Dyer in horror, as though he were some dreadful monster. "The Inquisition, the *auto-da-fé*, the galleys for my son? George! I conjure you, on your honour as an Englishman, tell me, is it possible that these awful things can be true?"

For a second or two George hesitated, considering what answer he should return to his mother's frenzied question. He knew that the horrors suggested by Dyer were true, and the knowledge that his brother was exposed to such frightful perils—might even at that precise instant be the victim of them—held him tongue-tied, for how could he confirm this blunt-spoken sailor's statement, knowing that if he did so he would be condemning his dearly-loved mother to an indefinite period of heart-racking anguish and anxiety that might well end in destroying her reason if indeed it did not slay her outright? He was as strictly conscientious as most of his contemporaries, but he could not bring himself to condemn his mother to the dreadful fate he foresaw for her if he told her the bald, unvarnished truth. He knew, by what he was himself suffering at that moment, what his mother's mental agony would be if he strictly obeyed her, therefore he temporised somewhat by replying:

"Calm yourself, mother dear, calm yourself, I beg you. There is no need for us to be unduly anxious about Hubert. I will not attempt to conceal from you that he is in evil case, poor dear fellow—all Englishmen are who fall into the hands of the Spaniards, especially if they happen to be Protestants—and I greatly fear me that some of those who were taken with Hu may be in grave peril of those dangers of which Dyer has spoken. But not Hubert. Hubert was an officer, and it is very rare for even Spaniards to treat captive officers with anything short of courtesy. I fear that our dear lad may have to endure a long term of perhaps rigorous imprisonment; he may be condemned to solitary confinement, and be obliged to put up with coarse food; but they will scarcely dare to torture him, still less to condemn him to the *auto-da-fé*. Oh, no, they will not do that! But while Dyer has been talking, I have been thinking, and my mind is already made up. Hubert must not be permitted to languish a day longer in prison than we can help. Therefore I shall at once set to work to organise an expedition for his rescue, and trust me, if he does not contrive to escape meanwhile—as he is like enough to do—I will have him out of the Spaniards' hands in six months from the time of my departure from Plymouth."

At the outset Dyer had listened to George's speech in open-mouthed amazement, and some little contempt for what he regarded as the young man's ignorance; but even his dense intellect could not at last fail to grasp the inward meaning and intention of the speaker; a lightning flash of intelligence revealed to him that it was not ignorance but a desire to spare his mother the anguish of long-drawn-out anxiety and the agony resulting from the mental pictures drawn by a woman's too vivid imagination; and forthwith he rose nobly to the exigencies of the occasion by chiming in with:

"Ay, ay, Mr Garge, you'm right, sir. Trust your brother to get away from they bloody-minded Spaniards if they gives him half a chance. For all that we knows he may ha' done it a'ready. And if he haven't, and you makes up your mind to fit out an expedition to go in search of mun, take me with ye, sir. I'll sarve ye well as pilot, Mr Garge, none better, sir. I've been twice to the Indies wi' Cap'n Drake, once under Cap'n Lovell and now again under Cap'n Hawkins. And I've a grudge to pay off again' the Spaniards; for at La Hacha they played pretty much the same trick upon Cap'n Lovell as they did this time upon Cap'n Hawkins."

"Aha! is that the case?" said George. "Then of course you know the Indies well?"

"Ay, that do I, sir," answered Dyer, "every inch of 'em; from Barbadoes and Margarita, all along the coast of the Main right up to San Juan de Ulua there ain't a port or a harbour that I haven't been into. I do believe as I knows more about that coast than the Spaniards theirselves."

"Very well, Dyer," returned George. "In that case you will no doubt be a very useful man to have, and you may rest assured that, should I succeed in organising an expedition, I will afford you the opportunity to go with me. Ah! here comes your supper at last—" as the maid Lucy appeared with a well-stocked tray—"Draw up, man, and fall to. You must stay with us to-night—is not that so mother?" And upon receiving an affirmative nod from his mother the young man continued—"and to-morrow I will send you over to Cawsand in our own boat."

Whereupon, Dyer, pious seaman that he was, having first given God thanks for the good food so bountifully set before him, fell upon the viands with the appetite of a man who has been two months at sea upon less than half rations, and made such a meal as caused Mrs Saint Leger to open her eyes wide with astonishment, despite the terrible anxiety on behalf of her first-born that was tugging at her heart-strings and setting every nerve in her delicate, sensitive frame a-jangle. And, between mouthfuls, the seaman did his best to reply to the questions with which George Saint Leger plied him; for it may as well be set down here at once that no sooner did the youngster learn the fact of his capture by the Spaniards than he came to the resolution to rescue Hubert, if rescue were possible; and, if not, to make the Spaniards pay very dearly for his death. But to resolve was one thing, and to carry out that resolution quite another, as George Saint Leger discovered immediately that he took the first steps toward

the realisation of his plan—which was on the following morning. For he was confronted at the very outset with the difficulty of finance. He was a lad of rapid ideas, and his knowledge of seafaring matters, and the Spaniards, had enabled him to formulate the outlines of a scheme, even while listening to Dyer's relation of the incidents of Hawkins' and Drake's disastrous voyage. But he fully recognised, even while planning his scheme, that to translate it into action would necessitate an expenditure far beyond his own unaided resources. True, his mother was very comfortably off, possessing an income amply sufficient for all her needs derived from the well-invested proceeds of her late husband's earnings, but George was quite determined not to draw upon that if he could possibly help it, although he was well aware that Mrs Saint Leger would be more than willing to spend her last penny in order to provide the means of rescuing her elder son from a fate that might well prove to be worse than death itself. Therefore the younger Saint Leger began operations by calling upon Mr Marshall, the merchant and owner of the *Bonaventure*, and, having first ascertained that that gentleman had definitely, though reluctantly, decided not to risk his ship in another Mediterranean voyage so long as the relations of England and Spain continued in their then strained condition, unfolded a project for an adventure to the Indies, which, if successful, must certainly result in a golden return that would amply reimburse all concerned for the risks involved. But Mr Marshall had not grown from an errand boy into a prosperous merchant without acquiring a certain amount of wisdom with his wealth, and he at once put his finger on the weak spot in George's proposal by inquiring what guarantee the latter could offer that his scheme would be successful when a very similar one conducted by such experienced adventurers as Hawkins and Drake had just disastrously failed. He frankly admitted that the young man's scheme was promising enough, on the face of it, and he also intimated that, as a merchant, he was always ready to take a certain amount of risk where the prospects of success seemed promising enough to justify it, but he no less frankly declared that, while he had the utmost confidence in George's ability as a seaman, he regarded him as altogether too young and inexperienced to be the head and leader of such an adventure as the one proposed; and he terminated the interview by flatly refusing to have anything to do with it.

Bitterly disappointed at his failure to enlist Marshall's active sympathy, George called upon some half a dozen other Plymouth merchants. But everywhere the result was the same. The adventure itself met with a certain qualified approval, but the opinion was unanimous that George was altogether too young and inexperienced to be entrusted with its leadership. In despair, George at last called upon Mr William Hawkins, the father of Captain John Hawkins, to obtain his opinion upon the project. Captain John had arrived home a day or two previously, and young Saint Leger was so far fortunate that he was thus able to obtain the opinion of both father and son upon it. As might have been expected, although these two seamen were friends of the Saint Legers, they were so embittered by disappointment at the failure of the recent expedition that they could not find words strong enough to denounce the scheme and to discourage its would-be leader, and so well did they succeed in the latter that for an hour or two George was almost inclined to abandon the idea altogether. Yet how could he reconcile himself to the leaving of his brother to a fate far worse than death itself—for though he had sought to make the best of the matter to his mother, he himself had no illusions as to what that fate would be—and how could he face his mother with such a suggestion? The lad had infinite faith in himself, he knew, better than anybody else, that he had never yet had an opportunity to show of what stuff he was made, he candidly admitted the damaging fact of his extreme youth, but he would not admit to himself that it was a disability, although others regarded it as such; he had been a sailor for seven years and during that time he had mastered the whole of the knowledge that then went to make the complete seaman; moreover, he was also old for his years, a thinker, and he carried at the back of his brain many an idea that was destined to be of inestimable value to him in the near future; therefore, after a long walk to and fro upon the Hoe, he returned home, disappointed it is true, but with his resolution as strong and his courage as high as ever.

And here he found balm and encouragement awaiting him in the person of one Simon Radlett, a shipbuilder, owning an extensive yard at Millbay.

"Old Si Radlett," as he was generally called, was something of a character in Millbay and its immediate neighbourhood, for, in addition to being admittedly the best builder of ships in all Devon, he was a bit of an eccentric, a man with bold and original ideas upon many subjects, a man of violent likes and dislikes, a bachelor, an exceedingly shrewd man of business, and—some said—a miser. He was turned sixty years of age, and of course had seen many and great changes in Plymouth during his time, yet, although well advanced in the "sere and yellow," was still a hale and hearty man, able to do a hard day's work against the best individual in his yard; and although he had the reputation of being wealthy he lived alone in a little four-roomed cottage occupying one corner of his yard, and did everything—cooking, washing-up, bed-making, etcetera, etcetera, for himself, with the assistance of a woman who came, for one day a week, to clean house, and wash and mend for him. He had known George Saint Leger from the latter's earliest childhood, and had loved the boy with a love that was almost womanly in its passionate devotion, nothing delighting him more than to have the sturdy little fellow trotting after him all over the yard, asking questions about ships and all things pertaining thereto.

He it was who had presented George with the toy ship that still occupied a conspicuous position in the latter's bedroom at The Nest, and which was such a gorgeous affair, with real brass guns, properly made sails, and splendid banners and pennons of painted silk, that the child had never cared to have another. And the affection which the old man had manifested for the child had endured all through the years, and was as strong to-day as it ever had been, yet such was Radlett's reputation for close-fistedness that it had never once occurred to George that he might possibly be willing to help him, consequently he had not sought him. No sooner, however, did the youngster enter the house and discover the old tarry-breeks in close and animated conversation with Mrs Saint Leger than his spirits rose; for it had been years since Radlett had so far presumed as to actually call upon madam, and George somehow felt intuitively that such an unwonted and extraordinary circumstance was in some way connected with the realisation of what had now become his most ardent desire.

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## Chapter Three.

### How old Simon Radlett made a certain proposition to George.

"Well, Garge, my son, so you'm safe whoam again," exclaimed the old shipbuilder, rising to his feet with outstretched hand, as young Saint Leger entered the room. "My word!" he continued, allowing his gaze to rove over the lad's stalwart frame, "but you'm growed into a reg'lar strapper, and no mistake; a reg'lar young Goliath of Gath a be, no less. And you've been a slayin' of a Philistine or two, here and there, so I do hear" (Mr Radlett was a little mixed in the matter of his Bible imagery, you will perceive, but he meant well). "Ay, ay; I've been havin' a crack wi' old Cap'n Burroughs, since mun comed whoam, and he've a been tellin' me all about ye. Garge, I'm proud of 'e, boy—and so be madam here, too, I'll be boun'—for 'twas I that made a sailor of 'e by givin' of 'e thicky toy bwoat, a matter o' twelve or vourteen year agone 'tis now. My goodness me! how time du vly, to be sure. It du seem to me only like a vew months ago that I took spokeshave and chisel in hand to make thicky bwoat, and here you be, a'most a man in years, and quite a man in experience as I du hear.

"Wi' madam your mother's good leave, I'll ask 'e to sit down, Garge, for I be comed over expressly to have a talk with 'e. And, first, let me say to 'e—as I've already said to madam, here—how sorry I be to hear of what ha' happened to your brother, Mr Hubert. But—as I was sayin' to madam when you comed in—you'll soon have mun out o' Spanish prison again, for I do hear as you'm arrangin' an adventure expressly for that purpose."

"I certainly *want* to arrange such an adventure, if the thing can be managed," replied George; "but I have got no farther than wanting, as yet. I have called upon Mr Marshall, the owner of the *Bonaventure*, and some half-dozen other merchants, and tried to interest them in my scheme, but all to no purpose. They say that I am much too young to be entrusted with the responsibility of heading such an adventure."

"Too young be danged!" exclaimed Radlett with energy.

"They don't know 'e as well as I do, Garge, or they wouldn't talk like thicky. Why, old Cap'n Burroughs told me hisself that if it hadn't ha' been for you the *Bonaventure* 'd ha' been in the Spaniards' hands to-day, and all hands o' her crew, *too*. *Too young?* Rubbidge! Now, just you tell thicky plan o' yours to me, and I'll soon tell 'e whether I do think you'm too young, or not. And I be an old man; I've seed a good many strange happenin's in my time, and I've drawn my own conclusions from 'em; I'm just so well able to form a sound opinion as Alderman Marshall or any other man to Plymouth. Now, Garge, you just go ahead, and when you've a done I'll tell 'e what I do think of your plan, and you too."

"Well," replied George, "it is simple enough. My brother was taken prisoner in the course of a treacherous attack made by the Spaniards upon a party of peaceful English traders; therefore I take the ground that his relatives are entitled to demand his release, together with compensation for any suffering or inconvenience that may have resulted from the treacherous action of the Spaniards. I learned, only to-day, that the Queen has already demanded satisfaction for the outrage from the Spanish Ambassador. But we all know what that means. The negotiations may go on for years, and the demand may be withdrawn in the end if by so doing the interests of diplomacy may be served. Therefore I do not propose to wait for that—for who trows what may happen to my brother in the interval? My plan is this: I intend to go on trying until I can find somebody sufficiently interested in my scheme either to advance me the money, or to entrust me with a ship. Then I will get together a crew who will be willing to go with me, taking a certain share of the proceeds of the expedition in lieu of wages—and I believe I shall be able to raise such a crew without difficulty—and I shall sail direct to San Juan de Ulua. Arrived there, I shall make a formal demand for my brother's immediate release. And if the Spaniards refuse, or attempt to put me off by saying that they do not know what has become of Hubert, I will at once attack the town, take it, and hold it for heavy ransom. And if ransom is refused, I will sack the place, taking every piece of gold or silver and every jewel that I can lay hands upon. And from there I will traverse the entire coast of the Spanish Main, attacking every town that promises to be worth while, until I have succeeded in persuading the Spaniards that it will be to their advantage to free my brother and deliver him over to me."

"And, supposin' that they should deliver up your brother at the first town you call at—San Juan de Ulua, I think you named the place—what'll you do then, boy?" demanded Radlett.

"I shall still require compensation for my brother's seizure," replied George. "And," he added, "that compensation will have to be amply sufficient not only to recompense Hu for his imprisonment, but also to pay handsomely all connected with the expedition. It is my intention, sir, not to return home until I can replace every pig of iron ballast in my ship with gold and silver."

"Hear to him! hear to him! Gold and silver, quotha!" exclaimed Radlett, delightedly. "And how big's thy ship to be, then, eh, Garge?"

"The biggest that I can get," answered George; "the bigger the better, because she will carry the more men, the more guns—and the more gold. I should have liked the *Bonaventure*, if I could have got her, for I'm used to her, and she is just the right size. But Mr Marshall will have nothing to do with me and my scheme."

"Ay, the *Bonaventure*," remarked the shipwright, meditatively. "Iss, her be a very purty ship, very purty indeed. What be her exact tonnage, Garge?"

"One hundred and twenty-seven," answered George. "Yes," he agreed, "she *is* a pretty ship in every way, and as good as she is pretty. And fast! There's nothing sailing out of Plymouth that can beat her—although perhaps I ought not to say as much to you, Mr Radlett, seeing that 'twas Mr Mason, your rival, who built her."

"Never mind vor that, boy, never mind vor that," answered Radlett, heartily. "'Tis true what you do say of the ship, every word of it; and she be a credit to the man who built her, although he do set up to be my rival. But 'twont be true very much longer, Garge, for I've a-got a ship upon my stocks now as'll beat the *Bonaventure* every way and in all weathers. I've a called her the *Nonsuch*, because there's never been nothin' like her avore. I drewed out the plans of her shortly a'ter the *Bonaventure* was launched, because I couldn't abear to be beaten by Mason nor nobody else.

And I altered they plans, and altered 'em, and altered 'em until I couldn't vind no more ways of improvin' of 'em, and then I started to build. And now the *Nonsuch* be just ready for launchin', and I'd like you to come over and look at her avore I puts her into the water."

"Certainly; I will do so with very great pleasure," answered George, delightedly, for he had a very shrewd suspicion that this invitation meant more than appeared upon the surface, that indeed—who knew?—it might mean that the eccentric old fellow was rather taken with his (George's) scheme, and might be induced to take a very important hand in it. "When shall I come?"

"Come just so soon as ever you can, the sooner the better; to-morrow if you do like," answered Radlett. "And now," he continued, rising, "I must be gettin' along, for 'tis growin' late and I be keepin' of you from your supper. No, thank'e, madam, I won't stay. My supper be waitin' vor me to whoam, and a'ter I've had it I've a lot o' things to do that won't wait for time or tide. So good-bye to 'e both. And you, madam, keep up your spirits about Mr Hubert; for I'll warrant that Garge, here, 'll have mun out o' Spanish prison in next to no time."

George was up and stirring betimes on the following morning, and, after an early breakfast, set out for Mr Radlett's shipyard at Millbay. He found the old man busily engaged upon certain papers in the little room which he dignified with the name of "office"; but upon George's appearance the old fellow hastily swept the documents pell-mell into a drawer, which he locked. Then, pocketing the key, he led the way to the back door of the house, which gave upon the shipyard, upon passing through which young Saint Leger immediately found himself in the midst of surroundings that were as familiar to him as the walls of his own home. But he had no time just then to gaze about him reminiscently, for immediately upon entering the shipyard his gaze became riveted upon the hull of a tall ship, apparently quite ready for launching, and from that moment he had eyes for nothing else. As he came abruptly to a halt, staring at the great bows that towered high above him, resplendent in all the glory of fresh paint and surmounted by a finely carved figure of an unknown animal with the head of a lion, the horns of a bull, the body of a fish, four legs shaped like those of an eagle, and the wings of a dragon, old Radlett nudged him in the ribs and, beaming happily upon him, remarked: "There a be, Garge; that's the *Nonsuch*. What do 'e think of her?"

"Upon my word I hardly know," answered George. "Let me look her over a bit, Mr Radlett, before you ask my opinion of her. Is she finished?"

"Finished?" reiterated the old man. "Iss, sure; quite finished, and all ready for launching. Why? Do 'e miss anything?"

"Why, yes," said George; "I see neither fore nor after castles. How is that?"

"Swept 'em both away, lad," was the answer. "What good be they? I allow that they be only so much useless top hamper, makin' a ship crank and leewardly. 'Tis the fashion to build 'em, I know; but I've thought the matter out, and I say that they do more harm than they be worth. Therefore I've left 'em out in the *Nonsuch*, and you'll see she'll be all the better for it. But although she have neither fore nor after castles, she've a poop, and a raised deck for'ard where guns can be mounted and where, sheltered behind good stout bulwarks, the crew'll be so safe as in any castle. Do 'e see any other differences in her?"

"Yes, I do," answered George, as he walked round the hull and viewed it from different standpoints; "indeed I see nothing but differences. The under-water shape of her is different, her topsides have scarcely any tumble-home, and she has not nearly so much sheer as usual. Also I see that you have given her a very much deeper keel than usual. That ought to be of service in helping her to hang to windward."

"So 'twill, boy; so 'twill," agreed Radlett. "You'll find that 'twill make a most amazin' lot o' difference when it comes to havin' to claw off a lee shore, all the difference, perhaps, between losin' the ship and savin' of her. Then, about the tumble-home, I don't see the use o' it. True, it do help to keep the sea from comin' over side in heavy weather, and keeps the decks dry. But then it do make the deck space terrible cramped up, so that wi' guns, and boats, and spare spars and what not, the crew haven't got room to move. But you'll see presently, when you goes aboard, that this here *Nonsuch* have got decks so roomy as a ship o' double her size. And I do hold that they almost vertical sides o' hern'll make mun ever so much finer a sea boat. And I've a-worked out the lines o' mun upon a new principle that, unless I be greatly mistaken, will make this here *Nonsuch* such a fast sailor that nothin' afloat'll be able to escape from mun—or catch mun, if so be that her have got to run away from a very superior force. And I be havin' the sails cut differently, too. I've thought it all out, and I've made up my mind that the way sails be cut up to now, they be very much too baggy, so that a ship can't go to windward. But I be havin' all the *Nonsuch's* sails cut to set so flat as ever they can be made, and—well, I do expect 'twill make a lot of difference. And now, Garge, havin' looked at her from outside, perhaps you'd like to go aboard and see what she do look like on deck and below."

George having agreed that this was the case, the old man led his visitor up a ladder reaching from the ground to the entry port. After the spacious deck had been duly admired and commented upon the pair entered the cabins in the poop and below, where again everything proved so admirable that young Saint Leger found himself quite at a loss for words in which to adequately express his approval, to the great delight of the proud designer of the ship.

At length, after a thoroughly exhaustive inspection of the ship, both inside and out, during which Radlett drew attention to and expatiated upon the various new ideas embodied in the design, the curiously contrasted pair retired to the little room which the shipwright called his office, and there sat down for a chat.

"Well, Garge," exclaimed the old man, as he seated himself comfortably in a great arm-chair, "now that you've had a good look at the *Nonsuch*, what do 'e think of her?"

"She is a splendid craft, and a perfect wonder, well worthy of her name," pronounced George with enthusiasm. "I should not be surprised to learn that she inaugurates an entirely new system of shipbuilding. She would be the very ship, of all others, for such an adventure as mine; but I suppose you have built her with an especial view to some particular kind of service. Even if you have not, I very much doubt whether I could raise the money in a reasonable

time to buy her. What price are you asking for her?"

"She is not for sale, boy," answered the old man with an inscrutable smile. "I built her in order to put to the test certain theories o' my own, and now, before ever she touches the water, I be sure, from the look of her, that my theories be right. So I be going to keep her and use her for my own purposes. And one o' they purposes be to make money so fast as ever I can. I've got neither chick nor child to think about and take care of, so my only pleasure in life be to build good ships and make good money with 'em.

"Now, Garge, when I sat listenin' to you talkin' last night, I says to myself—'There's money, and lots of it, in that there adventure o' Garge's, if 'tis only worked right. But it'll want a good leader, and a good ship; and young as Garge Saint Leger be, I do believe he've a-got the brains and the courage for it, while I've got the ship. If I'd a built the *Nonsuch* expressly for such an adventure she couldn't ha' been better suited for it.' So I comed home and thought the thing over until I'd made up my mind about it. Now, Garge, I'm willin' to do this for 'e. I'll launch the *Nonsuch* just as sune as we can get the cradle builded. Then, directly that she be afloat, I'll put on a strong gang o' riggers to get her masts in and rigged and her spars across—the sails be makin' now, and'll be finished by the time that she's ready vor 'em; and when she's all complete I'll fit her out in ordnance, ammunition, and weapons of all sorts, and provision her for a year's cruise, all at my own expense. You shall have her for your adventure upon condition that you provide a sufficient crew for her, to my satisfaction, and that, for the use of the ship and her equipment, I be to have one half of all the treasure you brings home; the other half to be disposed of as you thinks fit. Now, what do 'e say? Will that arrangement suit 'e?"

"It will suit me admirably, Mr Radlett, and I agree to your proposal with a thousand thanks and the greatest pleasure," said George. "Indeed," he added, "it was precisely such an agreement as I desired to enter into with Mr Marshall, or some other merchant, but none of them would listen to me. And very lucky it is for me that they would not, for with none of them should I have got such a ship as the *Nonsuch*. What is her tonnage?"

"Just three tons bigger than the *Bonaventure*, accordin' to her measurements," answered Radlett, "but she'll have twice so much accommodation for a crew as Marshall's ship have got; because the *Bonaventure* be built for cargo carryin' while the *Nonsuch* be built more for fightin' and sailin'. Now do 'e see?" And the old fellow accompanied his explanation with a dig in the ribs that was intended to convey to George several things that it was best not to discuss too openly.

Of course George fully understood his companion's meaning, understood—that is to say—that the *Nonsuch* had been specially designed and built with a view to her employment as a freebooter, free-trader—as it was then euphemistically termed—or a pirate! But let not the reader be too greatly shocked at this frank admission. For in the days of George Saint Leger piracy was regarded as a perfectly legitimate and honourable trade—always provided that the acts of piracy were perpetrated only against the enemies of one's country. A pirate, indeed, in those days, was synonymous with the individual who was termed a privateersman at the time of the Napoleonic wars. George Saint Leger, although a perfectly honest and even God-fearing young man, received old Radlett's hint, with all that it implied, without turning a hair, for it implied nothing worse than he had contemplated from the moment when he first heard of his brother's capture. It was generally agreed, at that time, that it was not only quite lawful but actually meritorious to make war upon and spoil the enemy of one's country, and Spain was England's enemy just then, secretly at all events. Many people maintained that she was God's enemy as well, therefore it was deemed doubly meritorious to make war upon her; so George Saint Leger had not the ghost of a scruple with regard to his projected raid upon the ports of the Spanish Main.

So the bargain was struck there and then, even to the drafting in duplicate and signing by both parties of a document setting forth the several terms and conditions of the agreement. After this George Saint Leger departed for home with a light step and a still lighter heart, to tell his mother the good news. And she, poor soul, listened to him with strangely mingled feelings; for on the one hand her heart was racked and torn with anxiety and fear for her elder son, a captive in the hands of men whose cruelties to enemies, and especially to so-called heretics, were even then sending thrills of horror and dismay through the Protestant world, while her nights were rendered sleepless by the visions of awful torments, conjured up by her too vivid imagination, which that son might even then be enduring. No wonder was it that, under such circumstances, the one great and paramount desire that possessed her, to the exclusion of all other things, was the deliverance of Hubert from the fate which she pictured for him. Yet, when it came to the point of consenting to the going of her second son to the rescue of her first, her very soul sickened within her lest George, instead of effecting his brother's deliverance, should himself fall into the toils. For she, like those merchants whom the lad had unavailingly approached, was convinced that the lad was altogether too young, too immature, too inexperienced to undertake the responsibility of leading such an expedition, and if he should fail, her last state would be worse than her first. And what hope of success for him dared she entertain at the very moment when all England was being profoundly stirred at the news of Hawkins' and Drake's disastrous failure? If they, seasoned and experienced mariners as they were, found themselves unable to stand against the might of Spain, what chance, she constantly asked herself, would such a mere boy as her George have? Thus she was swayed by first one form of terror and then the other until her reason threatened to give way altogether under the strain, and in sheer desperation she sought, quite unavailingly, to find distraction in preparing George's wardrobe for the voyage. As for George, he saw the terrible struggle through which his beloved mother was passing, read her every thought, realised her every fear, and when he was not engaged at the shipyard with old Radlett, devoted himself strenuously to the almost superhuman task of allaying those fears, driving them out, and infusing some measure of hopefulness in their place. And so energetically did he strive that at length he actually succeeded in convincing not only Mrs Saint Leger, but also himself, that the expedition would certainly be successful and that he would be able to bring home his brother safe and sound.

Meanwhile, old Si Radlett was nothing if not thorough in his methods, and, having made up his mind to engage in a speculation that, if decidedly risky, might yet result in enormous profit to himself, allowed no grass to grow under his feet. Every man in his yard was at once detailed for service on and about the *Nonsuch*, the cradle was built, and on a certain raw but brilliant morning of early March, Mrs Saint Leger, well wrapped up in furs, was escorted by George to

the shipyard in Millbay, where she had undertaken to preside at the launch of, and perform the ceremony of christening, the ship which was to bear one of her sons across the tempestuous Atlantic to the rescue of the other.

The launch of a ship in those days was a much less ceremonious affair than it is to-day, yet the piety of the time was so real, and so intimately pervaded the affairs of daily life, that a short religious service was deemed as necessary at the christening of a ship as at that of a child; and accordingly a small platform was erected under the bows of the *Nonsuch*, where, with Mrs Saint Leger beside him, the vicar of the church in which old Radlett worshipped every Sunday morning, read certain passages of scripture, preached a short sermon, and then offered up special prayers beseeching God's blessing upon the ship. After this the spur-shores were knocked away, and to the blare of trumpets and the roll of drums, Mrs Saint Leger dashed a bottle of wine against the great cutwater of the gaily bedizened ship as she began to move down the ways, exclaiming, as she did so:

"God bless the good ship *Nonsuch* and all who are to sail in her!" And she said it not perfunctorily, but from her heart; for the lives and fortunes of the two who were nearest and dearest to her in the whole world were irrevocably bound up with the ship.

George did not occupy the platform beside his mother. As soon as he had seen her safely placed, he made his way to a point in the yard from which he could advantageously view the plunge of the ship into "her native element," and his heart thrilled with joy and pride as he noted with a keen, appreciative, and understanding eye the manner in which the hull took the water, the buoyancy with which, after the first deep plunge, she rose to her bearings and sat upon a perfectly even keel, and the cleanness with which she divided the water as she drove out toward the middle of the bay. Then, too, the craft being farther distant from him than he had ever before viewed her, he was the better able to observe the very marked differences in model which Radlett had introduced into her design, the easier and more flowing lines, the more graceful shape, the shallower hull, and the absence of those towering fore and after castles which rendered the ships of those days so awkward, crank, and uneasy in heavy weather; and he told himself grimly that with such a ship as that, and with a good strong sturdy crew of staunch Devonian hearts to back him up, it should not be his fault if he did not make the word "Englishman" a name of dread from one end to the other of the Spanish Main.

From the moment of the launch the preparations for the voyage progressed rapidly, yet not as rapidly as George could have wished, for the time was one of great difficulty and tension in England; war with France, or Spain, or both, threatened to break out at any moment; the country was swarming with spies, and it was therefore of vital importance to the success of the expedition that the most absolute secrecy concerning it should be maintained. It was even necessary that the very existence of the ship and the fact of her being fitted out should be noised abroad as little as possible, for, as things then were, in the event of a crisis arising it was quite upon the cards that the authorities might lay forcible hands upon the craft and annex her for the service of the country. Such a condition of affairs militated very strongly indeed against extreme rapidity of progress; yet so well did cunning old Radlett manage that, in spite of everything, the process of rigging the *Nonsuch* and preparing her for sea went forward with surprising speed. It was of course impossible to keep the fact of her fitting-out an absolute secret from everybody, so when inquisitive people came prowling about the wharf, asking all sorts of inconvenient questions, old Radlett gave them to understand, with many nods and winks of mystery, that he had it in his mind to see what could be done with her in the way of a trading voyage to the eastern Indies, where, he understood, pots of money were to be made by those who were willing to take a little risk.

Every day saw a little further progress made, an additional spar raised into position and secured, a little more added to the complicated maze of rigging; and meanwhile George, accompanied by Robert Dyer, who had been hunted up the moment that his services could be made useful, went hither and thither all over Plymouth and its neighbourhood, day after day, hunting up desirable recruits, including many of the *Bonaventure's* former crew, until in process of time they contrived, between them, to get together no less than one hundred men, all of them of the true Devon breed, ready to go anywhere and do anything. Under ordinary conditions so large a crew would have found themselves cramped for room in a ship of the *Nonsuch's* tonnage. But the *Nonsuch* was not designed for cargo carrying. She was essentially a fighting ship, her cargo-space being only about half the capacity of other ships of her size, the remainder of the hold being fitted to serve as a spacious 'tween-decks, affording accommodation for an even larger crew than George and her owner had decided was necessary. And, in addition to the 'tween-decks, there were of course the cabins, plainly but comfortably fitted up, which included the captain's state cabin in the stern of the ship, the main cabin, in which the officers would take their meals and which would be used by them at other times as a council chamber and general living-room, and cabins for the pilot or sailing master, the captain of the soldiers, the chaplain, the surgeon, and the purser.

By the time that this formidable crew had been collected together the *Nonsuch* was practically complete, so far as rigging and equipment were concerned, and a week later found her with provisions, water, powder, and stores of every description on board, as well as her crew, and only waiting for a fair wind to enable her to go to sea. It was April, and after a long spell of bitter north-easters the weather had changed, a south-westerly wind had set in, with mild, rainy weather, and although George declared himself ready to go to sea and attempt to beat down-channel, old Radlett strenuously opposed the idea, upon the plea that it would be merely a waste of time and a needless risking of the ship. But a day or two later a hint was brought to him to the effect that the attention of the authorities had at last been directed to the *Nonsuch* and the question of her being taken over by the Government was being discussed, whereupon the old man withdrew his opposition, and, the weather falling opportunely calm at the same moment, George took a hasty farewell of his mother, hurried aboard, gave orders for the lowering and manning of all boats, and on the afternoon of a certain balmy day of mid-April, triumphantly towed his ship out to sea until, abreast of the Mewstone, he fell in with a small southerly air to which he spread his every sail and so passed out of sight to the westward, while Mrs Saint Leger, having crossed to Mount Edgcumbe, stood on Rame Head, watching, until the white sails vanished in the golden haze of evening.

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## Chapter Four.

### How the "Nonsuch" came to Trinidad and was careened there.

In these strenuous days of severe competition and universal education, when there are far more men anxious to obtain responsible positions than there are responsible positions to be filled, a man often reaches middle age before he is able to secure a command of the relative importance conferred upon George Saint Leger when the latter was given the command of the *Nonsuch*. But in those days competition was nothing like so keen as it is to-day, especially among seafarers, where men of education were comparatively rare. Such men were only needed to take command of the ships which were being built to meet the requirements of England's rapidly expanding trade with "foreign parts," and no sooner was a man qualified to command than shipowners were glad enough to snap him up. Also the sum of seafaring knowledge in those days was infinitely less than it is now. The art of navigation was, comparatively speaking, in its infancy, and it was therefore quite possible to produce a finished seaman in the space of five years, or even less. Consequently there were many Elizabethan captains who were little more than boys when they obtained their first command, the immortal Drake, Saint Leger's illustrious contemporary, being among them. Boys began life earlier than they do now, and consequently were often occupying positions of great responsibility at an age when the public school-boy of the present day is just beginning to think of abandoning his studies in order to enter upon a career. Hence it is not surprising that, after seven years of active sea life, George Saint Leger, young as he was, was deemed by his old friend Radlett as fully qualified to command what in those days was considered a very fine ship, and to head an expedition of very great importance. True, Mr Marshall, the owner of the *Bonaventure*, had expressed some doubt as to George being old enough for the responsibility of command, but he did not know the lad so well as old Si Radlett did, and had not followed his career with the same interest; and no sooner was the *Nonsuch* clear of the channel—which event occurred on the day following that of her departure from Plymouth—than the young commander began to justify the confidence which his new owner had reposed in him.

For, undoubtedly, George Saint Leger was a born seaman. Not only did he ardently love the sea and everything connected with it, but he early developed a faculty of understanding ships, their tackling, and how to handle them. Knowledge that some men acquired only slowly and with difficulty he seemed to grasp intuitively. The mysteries of navigation soon ceased to be mysterious to him, and seven years of active sea experience had taught him all that there was to learn in the way of handling a crew and training it to work together in such a manner that its efforts might be employed to the best advantage. Therefore, once fairly at sea, he began to sedulously exercise his crew, first in the work of reducing and making sail, until he had brought them to a pitch of unsurpassable perfection in that particular direction. Then he as sedulously drilled them in tacking, veering, and other manoeuvres. Finally, he exercised them at the guns, putting them through all the actions of loading, aiming, firing, and sponging out their weapons—but without much expenditure of his precious ammunition—until there was probably no smarter or capable crew afloat than that of the *Nonsuch*. It must not be supposed that all this was accomplished without developing a certain amount of friction. The ship had not been it sea a full week before her young commander discovered that, despite all his care, he had picked up a few grumblers and shirkers who failed to see the necessity for so much strenuous training, but it was just here that his own personal gifts came to the front. By dint of argument, raillery, and—in one or two particularly bad and obdurate cases—judicious chastisement he finally succeeded in, what is termed in modern parlance, "licking them into shape."

The usual course to the West Indies in those days was by way of the Azores and the Cape Verdes, at one or both of which places ships were wont to renew their supplies of wood, water, and provisions, and from the last of which mariners shaped a due west course before the trade-winds. But, as already hinted, George Saint Leger was a young man of somewhat original ideas, and geography was one of his favourite studies. He knew that the direct course from the chops of the channel, was, as nearly as might be, south-west; therefore he determined to steer a south-westerly course whenever the wind would permit, instead of following the usual long route via the Azores and the Cape Verde islands; but with the assistance of a roughly made globe he had also puzzled out the fact, not then generally recognised, that in the latitude of sixty degrees a degree of longitude was only about half the length of the same degree at the equator, therefore he also determined to make as much westing as possible at the very outset of his voyage. And this he was able to do with very satisfactory results, for the light southerly air which had sprung up and met him when he towed his ship out of Plymouth Sound not only freshened up into a brisk breeze of such strength that he could only show "topgallants"—as they were then called—to it by rather bold "carrying-on," but it lasted a full week, during which the reckoning showed that the ship—which proved to be amazingly fast—had sailed a distance of fully twelve hundred miles, or more than half the distance between England and Newfoundland. Then a westerly gale sprang up, which lasted nine days, during which the *Nonsuch*, under close-reefed canvas, drove southward to the latitude of Madeira, where the ship encountered calms and light variable winds for five days before falling in with the trade-winds; after which the troubles of the voyagers were over. For thereupon ensued not only a constant fair wind, but also fine weather, so that the ship sailed on day after day over a sparkling, gently heaving sea of deepest blue tipped with tiny creaming foam-caps out of which leaped those marine marvels the flying-fish in countless shoals as the bows clove the roaring surges, while overhead the sky daily assumed a deeper, richer tint of sapphire, out of which the sun, scarcely veiled by the solemn drifting trade-clouds, shot his beams with ever-increasing ardour.

And then, at dawn of the thirty-first day after their departure from Plymouth, there was sighted, on the extreme verge of the western horizon, a small wedge-like shape of filmy grey which Dyer, the pilot, pronounced to be the island of Barbados, and the crew, weary by this time of a whole month's gazing upon nothing but sea and sky, swarmed up on deck at the welcome cry of "Land ho!" and leaned over the bows, gazing rapturously at the little spot of solid earth as it grew in size and strengthened in tint. And lo! as they gazed a cloud formed over the island, darkening it into shadow. The underside of the cloud was black and threatening, and presently its bosom shot forth vivid lightnings, green, blue, rosy red, and sun-bright flashes of dazzling brilliancy, the low, deep booming of thunder was heard, and soon the island vanished behind a violet veil of tropical rain, only to reappear, a quarter of an hour later, fresh, green, and sparkling in the ardent rays of the tropic sun.

But as the ship sped on it was seen, to the bitter disappointment of all, and especially of those who were beginning to

suffer from that terrible scourge of sailors, scurvy, that it was not the intention of the young captain to call there, and deep murmurings of discontent arose as the *Nonsuch* went rolling past the southern extremity of the island, at a distance of not more than a mile, and it was seen to be covered with tropical trees glorious in every conceivable shade of green and gorgeous with many-tinted flowers, for it seemed a very fairy land to those men, whose eyes were weary of the unending sameness of sea and sky, day after day, for thirty-one days. Besides, many of those trees doubtless bore luscious fruits, and oh! how grateful would those fruits be to the palates of men dry and burnt with a solid month of feeding upon salt beef and pork! George heard the murmurings and saw the black looks, and called Dyer to him. Then the two went forward. Mounting the topgallant-forecastle, where he could be seen and heard by everybody, George waved his hand for silence, and presently began to speak.

“Men of Devon,” he said, “I perceive that you are disappointed because I do not intend to touch at yonder island. And I can well understand your disappointment, for truly never have I seen a fairer sight than it presents. I can tell, by my own feelings, how greatly you would enjoy a run ashore there. But, lads, there is a good reason for our avoidance of that island, and it is this. God has been very good to us, so far, in granting us such a splendid passage across the vast Atlantic ocean; but splendid as that passage is, it has still been long enough to develop scurvy among us; and at the suggestion of Doctor Chichester, I have decided, in council, that before making our attempt against the Spaniards I will put in and give you all a fortnight ashore, both to regain your health and also to careen the ship and remove the weed which you have only to look overside to see. Judging from sight alone, no better harbourage could we find than that which we have just passed. But, men, our pilot tells me that the place—which is named Barbados—is much frequented by the Spaniards, if indeed they have not already taken possession of it; and we should find ourselves in sorry plight if, while the ship is hove down, two or three Spanish sail were to appear and attack us. Doubtless we should beat them off; but we’ve not come all this way to fight just for fighting’s sake. I fight when and where I choose, and to please myself, not the enemy. Therefore, instead of touching at Barbados, where we are liable to attack, we are going two days’ sail farther on, to an island twenty times as big as Barbados, twenty times as beautiful, and quite safe, because, beautiful as the island is, the Spaniards have not yet found time to settle upon it. Mr Dyer, here, knows the place, and he’ll tell you all about it.” And he stood aside, giving place to the pilot.

“Shipmates,” said Dyer, turning to the crowd of eager-eyed men clustered thickly about the deck below him, “you do all look most terrible disapp’nted because we’m leavin’ thicky island astern, instead of goin’ in and anchorin’ before mun. But though he do look so good and enticin’ he baint quite so good as he do look. For all about here—and this here island o’ Barbados in partic’lar—I’ve heard tell be subject to the most dreadful hurricanes that it’s possible for mortal man to imagine, and we don’t want to go in there and have our ship hove half a mile up into the woods by a storm-wave so that she won’t be no more use to us. Besides that, as our cap’n have said, the place is used, off and on, by the Spaniards, and we don’t want ’em to come lookin’ for us until we be ready to meet ’em. So we’m going on a matter o’ two days’ sail to the most beautiful island in these here parts, called Trinidad, after the impious fashion o’ the Spaniards, where I knows of a fine, snug little cove where the ship’ll be so safe as ever she was to Millbay, and where we needn’t fear either hurricanes or Spaniards. There we can take our ease and enj’y the lovely fruits that the Almighty have provided for the refreshment of poor sea-worn mariners.”

“Then, baint there no Spaniards to Trinidad, Mr Dyer?” demanded one of the men.

“Not yet there baint,” answered Dyer. “Doubtless in time they’ll find their way there; but at present they’m so eager after gold that they only settles where gold is to be found. And there’s no gold in Trinidad, nothin’ but harmless Indians, and fruit in plenty—and snakes. You’ll have to be wary and keep a good look out for snakes, when you gets ashore to Trinidad; but that du hold good of all the Indies.”

So the men settled down again to wait in patience for the appearance of the earthly paradise promised them by Dyer, and, sure enough, the dawn of the second day after passing Barbados revealed high land on the larboard bow, serrated in outline, and tree-crowned to its very summit. As the ship stood on, driven smoothly forward by the good trade-wind, bringing the saw-like ridges back toward the beam, it was seen that the land consisted of two islands instead of one, the nearer and lesser of which is to-day known as Tobago. But Dyer knew nothing of Tobago, whereas he had been inside the Gulf of Paria once before; therefore the *Nonsuch* held steadily on until Tobago drew out clear upon the larboard quarter, when a break in the continuity of the land ahead was descried, and presently this break revealed itself as an opening full ten miles wide, in the eastern half of which stood three islands—or four, rather, for upon a still nearer approach it was seen that the middle island was divided into two by a channel so narrow that at a little distance it looked as though a man might leap across it. And upon either side of the opening, up sprang the land sheer out of the sea to a height of eighteen hundred feet, steep, and shaggy, with tropical foliage of the most varied and glorious tints.

Straight for the centre of the passage between the middle and the most easterly island steered Dyer, and when presently the ship entered the passage and her sails were almost becalmed by the intervention of the high land to windward, the amazed seamen found themselves entering a magnificent land-locked gulf so deep and so wide that they could not determine the limits of it. It was not until some time afterward that they found it to measure some fifty miles deep by ninety miles wide! And thus they got their first glimpse of the wonderful Gulf of Paria.

Once clear of the passage—now known as the Boca de Huevos—Dyer trimmed his yards flat and brought the ship as close to the wind as she would lay, keenly watching the various points and indentations as they opened out, one after the other, until at length a group of five small tree-crowned islets opened out clear of an intervening island, when he rubbed his hands and chuckled delightedly.

“Ah, ah!” he exclaimed, “there a be, there a be! I was a’most beginnin’ to fear as I’d forgot, or that an earthquake had happened, or somethin’. But ’tis all right. You see they five little bits of islands away over yonder, Cap’n? Well, they be my landmarks, and as soon as we’ve stood far enough on to fetch ’em we’ll go about.”

As the ship opened out from under the lee of the weather shore it was found that the trade-wind was piping up briskly athwart the gulf, but notwithstanding this it was nearly an hour before the *Nonsuch* had reached far enough to



the southward to enable her to make the islets on the next tack, and when at length she was hove about it was another full hour before she glided close past a low point and rounding-to, let go her anchor in three fathoms, in a snug little cove that looked as though it had been specially formed for the careening of ships.

The cove was situated within a bay, and was formed by a hook-like projection of land high enough not only to hide the ship from the view of any chance voyager who might happen to enter the gulf for reconnoitring purposes, but also effectually to protect her in the unlikely event of the trade-wind dying down and giving place to a gale from the westward. Moreover, the high land to the eastward so effectually protected the place from the trade-wind that a perpetual calm existed in the cove, even when the trade-wind was piping up with the strength of half a gale a few hundred yards away. The shore was a narrow strip of sandy beach, completely submerged at high water, beyond which lay a space of low, flat ground about half a mile in width, gradually rising as it receded from the shore, and running up in a sort of tongue for a distance of about two miles between two lofty, steep-sided hills, densely covered with trees of various kinds, while the entire shore, for miles in either direction, was thickly fringed with coconut trees. Strangely enough, for some unknown reason, the ground between the narrow fringe of coconut trees bounding the shore-line and the base of the hills, was bare of trees, the soil being covered with a dense growth of guinea-grass, with a few bushes and flowering shrubs sparsely dotted about here and there—it therefore offered ideal facilities for camping.

After George and the surgeon, accompanied by Dyer, had gone ashore and very carefully inspected the place, it was decided at once to unbend the ship's sails, carry them ashore, and temporarily convert them into tents for the accommodation of all hands, which would afford the sick an opportunity to recover their health and strength while the operation of careening and scraping the ship was proceeding. This was accordingly done, and by nightfall the camp was ready for occupation, and the entire crew, with the exception of an anchor watch, slept ashore that night.

The following day was devoted to the task of transferring to the shore the whole of the ordnance, weapons, ammunition, and a considerable portion of the ship's stores, one party attending to this business while a second party, under George's personal supervision, proceeded to entrench the camp and otherwise put it into a state of defence, a third party of half-a-dozen men, under Chichester, the surgeon, exploring the woods in the immediate neighbourhood in search of fruit, of which they brought in large quantities, consisting of bananas, mangoes, prickly pears, *ananas*, custard-apples, soursops, guavas, and a sackful of coconuts which Dyer showed the men how to open so that they could get at and quaff the refreshing "milk." And oh, how delighted everybody was to find himself in this tropical island paradise, where strange fruits of the most exquisite flavour were to be had for the mere trouble of plucking, where the air was fragrant with a thousand mingled perfumes, where there was a perfect riot of flowers of strange shapes and most gorgeous colouring to delight the eye, and where humming-birds flashed hither and thither like living gems in the dazzling, blistering rays of the sun. True, there were one or two drawbacks—the heat, for instance, was terrific in that hemmed-in valley where only a transient breathing of the trade-wind penetrated at rare intervals; and the men soon found that paradise still harboured the serpent, for several snakes were seen and one was killed—a diabolically handsome but most wicked-looking creature clothed in a skin of greyish black ornamented with a diamond pattern consisting of lattice-like lines of yellow, and having the flat heart-shaped head which betrayed its venomous character. Also there were innumerable insects and creeping things, notably centipedes up to a foot in length, whose bite would certainly result in several hours of excruciating agony which might even terminate in death, and small black ants which insinuated themselves between a man's clothing and his skin and tormented him to the verge of madness. But these things troubled the men very little, for under Dyer's tuition they soon learned how to protect themselves against the plagues; and meanwhile the salubrious air, the luscious fruits, the perfume from the flower-laden woods, and the many beautiful sights which surrounded them were real things in the enjoyment of which they forgot all drawbacks. Thus far, no natives, or human beings of any sort other than themselves, had been seen the inference therefore was that the island, at all events that part of it in which the Englishmen had established themselves, was uninhabited, and they therefore went about their work without fear of disturbance or interruption of any kind.

By the end of the week the ship was empty and all ready for heaving down; and when the men knocked off work on the Saturday night George let it be known that nothing would be done on the following day, and that after divine service in the morning all hands would be free for the rest of the day, and at liberty to amuse themselves as they pleased. Nevertheless he warned them all not to stray far from the camp, and even then to keep together in little companies of half a dozen or so, and also to go fully armed. For although they had seen no natives thus far, it was quite possible that the woods might be full of them, watching and only waiting for an opportunity—when the English were off their guard—to rush the camp and destroy every one of its occupants. Accordingly, on the Sunday, after prayers and an early dinner, those who were bent upon exploration armed themselves and wandered off up the valley in small parties in accordance with George's directions. But the heat was so intense that few of the men were disposed to ramble very far. They had been working hard ever since the arrival of the ship and were more disposed to spend the day in camp, resting quietly or practising archery at the butts which they set up.

Seeing this, George, the parson, and the surgeon decided to rig the quarter boat and proceed on a voyage of exploration eastward in her; and this they did, arriving, after a beat to windward of some five and a half miles, off the mouth of a river which seemed to be discharging down a long and very tempting-looking valley. There were no natives to be seen, or any signs of them; therefore, tempted by the possibilities which the exploration of the river held out to them, they entered and sailed up it until it shoaled so much and its bed became so obstructed with rocks that the boat could proceed no farther. Then it became a question whether they should adopt the dictates of prudence and return to the ship, or whether they should risk something by landing and pursue the further exploration of the river on foot. Eventually they decided that as the afternoon was still young, and nothing had been seen that was in the slightest degree alarming or suggestive of possible danger, they would take such small amount of risk as was involved in landing and investigate the course of the river a little farther, the beauties of the place very strongly appealing to them. Accordingly they landed, concealing the boat beneath the foliage of a remarkable tree that conveniently overhung the stream.

Having cunningly hid the boat and looked carefully to the priming of their firearms, the adventurous trio stepped

ashore, George, with drawn sword, leading, while Chichester, the surgeon, brought up the rear. They were compelled to closely follow the course of the stream, since the woods on either hand were so dense and impenetrable that it would have been impossible to pass through them, save by hewing their way, and this was of course not to be thought of. Besides, it was the river that they desired to explore, since only by following its banks could anything be seen of the many strange and beautiful things that surrounded them; therefore they pressed forward, now on the solid ground close by the river margin, and now scrambling, ankle and sometimes knee deep, along the boulder-strewn bed of the stream itself, pausing at frequent intervals to admire some forest giant dressed in vivid scarlet blossoms instead of leaves, or another thickly festooned with trailing creepers gorgeous with blooms of marvellous form and most extravagant hue, or a graceful clump of bamboo, soaring like gigantic plumes of feathers a hundred feet into the heat-palpating air. Frequently, too, they halted to watch the motions of some tiny humming-bird hovering like a living gem over the cup of a flower, or the flight of a gaudily painted kingfisher or parrot. A great silence pervaded the woods, for the trees were for the most part so lofty that the sough of the wind in their topmost branches was inaudible, and it was the hour when the insect world indulged in its daily siesta. Animals there were none to be seen, but an occasional sudden quick rustle of the grass told them that snakes were to be watched for and guarded against.

In this fashion the trio proceeded slowly up the river, talking but little save when one of them in a low voice directed the attention of the others to some object worthy of notice, until gradually their ears caught a sound which told them that they were approaching a waterfall; and five minutes later they sighted it close at hand—and involuntarily halted, struck dumb and motionless for the moment by the extraordinary beauty of the picture which lay before them. The waterfall, the sound of which had reached them a few minutes earlier, was some sixty feet in height and about twelve feet wide, the river tumbling vertically down the perpendicular face of the cliff into a wide basin, the lofty sides of which were draped with the graceful fronds of giant ferns, the broad leaves of the wild plantain, crimson-leaved acacias, enormous bunches of maidenhair, and several varieties of plant and bush, the names of which were unknown to the trio of gazers, and which were brilliant with blossoms of the most lovely hues. The fall leaped out of a kind of tunnel formed by the intertwined branches of overhanging trees, the sombre foliage of which was brightened by numerous festoons of flowering creepers. But it was not so much the extraordinary fairy-like beauty of the scene as a whole—the charm of which was further enhanced by the loveliness of the humming-birds and great butterflies that flitted hither and thither in the cool, spray-laden atmosphere of the place—nor the marvellous profusion of new and wonderful flowers of every conceivable tint that everywhere met the eye, which so powerfully fascinated the beholder; it was the wonderful, exquisite blue colour of the water in the basin itself, which, although of crystalline transparency, receives its marvellous colouring through some freak of sky reflection penetrating through the branches of the overhanging trees. The effect of this wonderful colouring must be seen to be appreciated. And it is seen and admired every day by enthusiastic sightseers, some of whom have journeyed thousands of miles to feast their eyes upon the beauties of the famous Blue Basin of Trinidad, which is not very greatly altered now from what it was when those three adventurous Devonians stood and gazed enraptured upon it, probably the first white men who ever beheld its magic loveliness.

For a space the trio stood spellbound, silent and motionless; then the spell relaxed its grip upon them sufficiently to permit of renewed movement and speech, and they burst into rapturous ejaculations as they moved forward to gaze again at closer quarters.

“Beautiful! beautiful beyond the power of human mind to imagine, or human tongue to tell,” exclaimed “Sir” Thomas Cole, the ship’s chaplain. “Well might the Psalmist say: ‘O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches.’ And I’ll warrant that David never looked upon such a scene as this, for ’tis not recorded that he was ever to the tropics. And if God hath seen fit to make this earth so beautiful, think, my masters, what must Heaven, His own abode, be like?”

“Ay, well may you say that, Sir Thomas,” answered Chichester “and yet, if there seems a chance of any of us going there, we’re willing to do almost anything to delay our departure.”

“Well, and ’tis not to be wondered at when this old earth of ours can show such loveliness as this,” commented literal, plain-spoken George. “For my part, I’m willing enough to be here, just now, to enjoy the beauty that the Lord has made to delight His people’s eyes. And what a glorious spot it is for a bathe! Come on, gentles; who’s for a dip? There’s time enough for a swim across and back again if we don’t delay too long. ’Twill be delightfully cooling and refreshing after our long walk from the boat.”

The proposal found immediate acceptance, for the heat had been overpowering, and the trio were streaming perspiration at every pore. It was Chichester only, who by virtue of his professional knowledge was aware of the evil results attending a sudden chill, who first took the precaution of advancing to the edge of the basin and testing the temperature of the water by plunging his hand into it, and it was while he was doing this that his attention was arrested by the peculiar appearance of what he at first took to be a large stone projecting out of the shallow water on the opposite side of the basin. At first sight it looked exactly like a grey boulder of some fifteen or twenty pounds weight, yet there was a certain something in its appearance which caused him to bestow a second and more attentive glance upon it, and now he felt not quite so certain that it really was a stone, after all. To resolve his doubts he picked up a small stone and threw it at the questionable object, the missile falling about a foot short. He felt almost sure that, as the stone plopped into the water, he detected a slight movement on the part of the mysterious object. To make quite sure, he threw a second stone, and this time his aim was better, the stone hitting the target fair and square in the middle. But the sound of the impact was not that of stone upon stone, it was rather that of stone upon wood, or even some still more yielding substance, and it was immediately followed by a loud angry hiss and the uprearing of the object aimed at. The next instant the amazed trio beheld the head and neck of a gigantic serpent lift itself some four or five feet out of the pool, while fierce hissings issued from the wide-opened jaws. For a few breathless seconds the enormous reptile glared around, apparently in search of the audacious disturbers of its slumbers, then, seeing the three white men standing on the opposite shore of the pool, it swung round, and came swimming, with an easy, undulatory movement of its body, straight toward them at an astonishing speed.

"Avaunt, Sathanas!" exclaimed Cole, throwing up his hands. "Surely 'tis the Devil himself in his original form that hath taken possession of this Eden! No mortal serpent was ever so big as thicky. Look to the length of mun! He must be all of thirty foot, or more. And look to the pace at which he cometh! We must run for it, my masters." And he turned with intent to fly from the scene.

"Not a bit of it," exclaimed George, who was by this time half undressed. "'Resist the Devil and he will fly from thee.' And if he be not the Devil, but only a mortal snake, there is still less reason for flight, seeing that there be three of us to one of him. Besides, I mean to have his skin, and take it home to my mother." And he snatched up his long, keen sword from the ground where he had thrown it when about to undress, and boldly advanced to the attack.

The python, which was of the species known as "anaconda," is very common in the forests bordering the Orinoco, and is occasionally found in Trinidad even to this day, the belief current with regard to its presence in the island being that the ancestors of those now found in the island originally reached it by swimming across the strait from the mainland, a distance of only some nine miles. They are very fond of the water, and are not venomous. But George did not know this, therefore it was all the more courageous of him that he should have determined to fight rather than retreat from the huge reptile.

The creature was making straight for a small space of smooth, level beach, free from big boulders and fallen logs, and as this afforded good firm foothold for a fight, young Saint Leger took up his position there, and boldly awaited the approach of the monster. The creature came steadily on, its eyes gleaming balefully; and presently it reached shallow water, when it suddenly threw its extended body into a coil, and raised its great head to the level of George's face, its immense jaws wide open, and its wire-like forked tongue darting and quivering as it emitted a series of savage hisses that might well have quelled the courage of the bravest man. But George was one of those peculiarly constituted people who know not what fear is. Danger but added a piquant zest to his enjoyment, and steadied instead of upsetting his nerves. He loved to pit himself, his courage, his coolness, his skill and his sagacity against what looked like overwhelming odds, and the formidable aspect of this enormous serpent, which might well have paralysed another man with terror, only had the effect of bracing him and filling him with the joy of combat. With his good sword gripped firmly in his hand he stood his ground, intently watching the movements of his formidable antagonist, with every muscle of his body tense and ready for action, and presently, when the python hurled itself at him with a lightning-like extension of its great coils, the lad as nimbly bounded aside, and at the same moment dealt a slashing blow at the spot where, a fraction of a second later, he knew its great head would be. A jar, which thrilled his sword arm to the shoulder, told him that his stroke had got home, and the next instant he was violently hurled a fathom away as the snake's severed head fell to the ground, and the enormous body, writhing in a thousand terrific convolutions, churned the blue waters of the basin into diamond-tinted spray. For full ten minutes the amazed trio stood gazing in breathless astonishment at the amazing twistings and writhings of the decapitated body, and then George, taking advantage of a momentary cessation of movement, dashed into the shallow water, seized the creature with both hands by its quivering tail, and drew it ashore. Then, impaling the severed and still gasping head upon his sword blade, and inviting his two friends to help him, the trio, with some difficulty, raised the still convulsively writhing and twitching body upon their shoulders and, thus heavily loaded, made the best of their way back to their boat.

The sun had already sunk behind the high land in the direction where their ship lay, when the adventurers, with their strange prize bestowed in the bottom of the boat, emerged from the river into the open waters of the gulf, and shortly afterward the darkness swept down upon them with the extraordinary suddenness peculiar to the tropics. But they cared nothing for that, for they now had a fair wind to carry them back to camp, the heavens were thickly studded with stars, shining with that exceeding brilliancy and splendour which is also peculiar to the tropics, and the men in camp had kindled a fire on the beach as a beacon to guide them back; they therefore had no difficulty in finding their way.

But their day's adventures were not yet quite at an end. For as the boat slid smoothly along under the impulse of the fast waning wind Cole, the chaplain, who was sitting on one of the side thwarts, while the surgeon balanced him on the other side of the boat, suddenly looked up from the water, into the dark depths of which he had been gazing, with the startled exclamation:

"Lord ha' mercy! what be that, now? Look, cap'n, look overside, do 'e, and tell me, if you can, what monstrous thing we've a-run foul of now." And as he spoke he pointed straight downward.

George, thus adjured, leaned over the gunwale and directed his gaze downward. What he saw was startling enough to cause him to suddenly shift his helm, with the result that the sail jibed over unexpectedly and all but capsized the boat. Luckily the wind had been dropping steadily for the last half-hour, so they escaped with no worse consequence than a gallon or two of water over the gunwale.

But what was it that caused young Saint Leger to so far forget himself? Simply a great shape, made brilliantly luminous by its passage through the water as it swam immediately underneath the boat, keeping pace with her. It was lozenge or diamond-shaped, about twenty-five feet long and thirty feet broad, with a tail some ten feet long trailing away behind it. The light generated by its passage through the water revealed it sufficiently to enable the startled beholders to perceive that it was undoubtedly a living thing of some sort, that it was propelling itself by the movement of its wing-like sides, and that at its forward angle—which was of course its head—it was furnished with a pair of great goggle eyes with which it seemed to be regarding the boat intently and not too amiably. Whether or not it was startled by the sudden flap of the sail as the boat jibed, it is of course impossible to say, but, be that as it may, as the boat suddenly swerved away from above it the huge creature rose with a rush to the surface and sprang right out of the water to a height of some twelve feet, and, flapping its enormous wings like a great bird, *flew right over the boat*, coming down on the other side of her, at a distance of some four or five fathoms, with a *boom* like the sound of a gigantic drum, and a disturbance of the sea so violent that it all but swamped the boat. Five times it soared into the air in this extraordinary fashion, luckily descending each time at a greater distance from the boat, and then it disappeared altogether, to the great relief of the voyagers.

"Looked as much like a giant thornback as anything I ever saw," remarked George, when at length the creature had freed them from its presence and their astonishment had sufficiently subsided to permit of their speaking again. "We must ask Dyer about it. I remember him telling me, some time ago, about a thing that he once saw when he was last in these seas, and from his description I think it must have been the same sort of fish. He said that the Indians called it, in their own language, the devil fish, or great sea bat, and they further told him that it is a most dangerous monster, since it has an unpleasant trick of rising alongside a canoe, overlapping it with one of its wings, and forcing canoe and occupants under-water. I think it not unlikely that the brute we just now saw may have been meditating to serve us in the same fashion, but was somehow frightened into thinking better of it."

Twenty minutes later the trio safely arrived at the camp without further adventure, and found all well there. The men, it seemed, had enjoyed the day of rest, each in his own fashion, some in practising archery, some in repairing and washing their clothes, some in bathing in the shallow water close inshore, while a party of their comrades in a boat kept watch outside them to frighten away intruding sharks; while others had walked up the valley, gathering fruit and flowers. One party, more adventurous than the rest, had, ignoring the order against straying far from the camp, penetrated the valley for a distance of some two miles, as far as the base of the hills at its higher extremity, and had there come upon a small Indian village, the inhabitants of which had at first fled at their approach, but had afterwards been induced to return and barter with them, giving barbed spears, feather head-dresses, parrots, monkeys and a queer-looking little animal something like a miniature pig encased in a shell-like coat—which the men had incontinently named a "hog in armour"—now known as the armadillo, in exchange for brass buttons off the white men's coats, old knives, fish-hooks and the like. Questioned by George as to the appearance of these same Indians, the men described them as extraordinarily ugly and dirty, wearing no clothing, but ornaments with pieces of bone thrust through their ears, nostrils and lips, very repulsive as to appearance, but apparently quite friendly disposed. And so indeed they proved to be, for on the following day a number of them approached the camp, bringing fruit, vegetables, and a variety of other articles, which they offered in exchange for almost any rubbish which the white men were willing to part with. And being treated kindly, by George's express orders, they continued this practice so long as the ship remained, to the very great profit and advantage of the English. Of course communication with them was exceedingly difficult, being conducted entirely by signs, hence it was found quite impossible to obtain any information whatever from them, the business transactions being conducted by the Indians exhibiting the goods which they desired to dispose of, and the English producing the articles which they were willing to give in exchange.

The ship was hove down on the following day, and, all hands working hard, one side of her was scraped clean and made ready for painting by the time that the men knocked off work at night. The next day was devoted to painting that side of her which had been scraped, and Wednesday was given up to the drying of the paint and a general overhaul of the stores. On Thursday the ship was righted, swung, and hove down again, exposing the other side of her bottom, and the process of cleaning, painting and drying was repeated, the operation being completed by the end of the week. Sunday was again observed as a day to be devoted to worship and recreation, and on Monday morning the ship was finally righted and the work of replacing her ballast, stores, ordnance, ammunition and so on was begun, the task ending on the following Friday night, by which time the *Nonsuch* was once more all at aunt and ready for any adventure which her young captain might choose to engage in. And, meanwhile, the invalids, who, at Doctor Chichester's suggestion, had been spared all labour, had completely recovered from their sickness, and were as well and strong again as ever. And, incidentally, the python which George had slain at the Blue Basin had been most scientifically skinned and the skin cured, stuffed with dry grass, stitched up, and the head joined to it again by an Indian whose services the young captain had contrived to secure; and when the *Nonsuch* sailed out of the Gulf of Paria on the eventful Saturday which saw the actual beginning of her great adventure, the skin—measuring thirty-four feet eight and a half inches from snout to tail—gracefully, if somewhat gruesomely, adorned the forward bulkhead of her state cabin.

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## Chapter Five.

### How they captured the "Santa Maria" at Margarita.

By the advice of Dyer, the pilot, George kept the mainland aboard upon issuing from the Gulf of Paria; for the island of Margarita was at no great distance to the westward. And not only was Margarita the spot where the Spaniards had established a vastly profitable pearl-fishing industry, but it was also a kind of depot where all sorts of supplies from Old Spain for the maintenance of her West Indian possessions were landed and stored, to be drawn upon as occasion might demand. There was, therefore, the double possibility of securing a more or less rich booty of pearls, and of replenishing the stores, somewhat depleted by two months of usage, at the Spaniards' expense.

Now, it was usual to approach Margarita from the northward; but that course involved the risk of being sighted from the battery which the Spaniards had constructed on the north-eastern extremity of the island; and to be sighted meant that the garrison of the battery would give timely warning to the colonists, who would thus be afforded ample opportunity to conceal such treasure of pearls or otherwise as they might happen to have on hand before the arrival of the English. Therefore Dyer counselled an approach from the south-eastward, taking care to keep far enough to the southward to escape observation from the inmates of the battery, assuring George that he was thoroughly acquainted with the navigation of those waters and guaranteeing that if his advice were followed the surprise of the colonists should be complete.

Accordingly the *Nonsuch* hugged the coast of the Main as closely as was at all prudent, a good look-out for rocks and shoals being maintained; and at dawn on the following morning high land was descried on the north-western horizon, which Dyer, having inspected it from aloft, confidently pronounced to be the mountain peaks of the eastern half of Margarita.

The ship was now, as she had been all through the night and the preceding day, within the influence of the land and sea-breezes, and it was under the influence of the former that she was now driving along to the westward. But Dyer

was aware that very shortly after sunrise the land breeze would die away and the ship would be becalmed for the best part of an hour before the setting in of the sea-breeze; therefore, knowing exactly where he was, with Margarita in sight, he gave the order to bear up and run off the land, which was done just in time to escape the calm and run into the trade-wind.

Two hours later more land was sighted, this time straight ahead, and a little later it was made out to be a small island, right in the fairway between Margarita and the main. And as, upon a nearer approach, a number of buildings were seen upon it, while in the offing a whole fleet of boats—which Dyer affirmed bore a remarkable resemblance to pearl-fishing-boats—were sighted at anchor, George resolved to give the place an overhaul before calling upon the Margaritans. Now, one advantage possessed by the *Nonsuch* happened to be that, owing to the peculiarity of her design, she bore a very remarkable resemblance to the Spanish race-ships, or *razees*, which, in conjunction with the great galleons, transacted almost the whole of the business on the Spanish Main; and Saint Leger determined to avail himself of this peculiarity in the hope that he would thereby be enabled to approach the little settlement without arousing the suspicion of its inhabitants. Accordingly he stood boldly on until he was abreast of the place—which now showed as one large wooden shed and about a dozen smaller ones, together with a small stone building which had the appearance of a church; then, rounding-to, came to an anchor, at a distance of about a mile from the shore, the colour of the water indicating that the island was surrounded by a shoal.

As the *Nonsuch* let go her anchor and clewed up her canvas, a number of people were seen to emerge from the sheds and stand gazing at her, as though curious to learn what her business might be. But they showed no signs of anxiety or alarm; on the contrary, when two boats, with their crews armed to the teeth, put off from the ship, under the command of George and Captain Basset, who commanded the small contingent of land forces forming part of the ship's company, the islanders came sauntering down to the beach to meet them.

A steady pull of about a quarter of an hour's duration took the boats to the beach of the island, which was a low and parched-looking place clothed with guinea-grass with a few clumps of palms and palmetto, and the inevitable coconut trees close down by the water. As George stepped ashore a tall, sallow man attired in trunk hose, gorget, and steel headpiece, with a long straight sword girded to his thigh, stepped forward from the little crowd of about a dozen people and courteously greeted his visitor in good Castilian Spanish.

George, whose trade with the Biscayan ports had enabled him to acquire a pretty thorough acquaintance with the Spanish language, returned the greeting in due form; but there was apparently something not quite right about his accent, for the Spaniard stepped back quickly and, clapping his hand to his sword-hilt, exclaimed:

“Señor, you are not a Spaniard! Who are you, and what is your business here?”

And as he did so his supporters made a movement which seemed the preliminary to a hurried retreat. Whereupon George threw up his right hand warningly and said—of course in Spanish:

“Stand fast, every one of you. The man who attempts to move will be instantly shot down. As to who I am, señor, it matters not. But my business is to examine this island, and particularly to see what yonder shed contains. Therefore I must trouble you and your comrades to surrender your swords for an hour or two. You are my prisoners.”

“But, señor, with all submission, this is an outrage,” expostulated the Spaniard. “I cannot surrender my sword to a stranger who declines to give me his name, and produces no authority for his actions.”

“This is my authority,” exclaimed George, suddenly whipping out his sword with a flourish. “Will you submit to it, or must I resort to sterner measures?”

“I submit, of course,” replied the Spaniard, “seeing that your party is much the stronger of the two. But I do so under protest; and I warn you, señor, that my Government will speedily avenge this outrage, which is worthy only of— Ha! now I know who you are. You are an Englishman—possibly that thrice-cursed corsair, Drake, who, last year, at San Juan de Ulua—”

“You are mistaken, señor; I am not Drake; nor does it matter who I am,” retorted George. “Come, señores, your swords, if you please, for I have little time to waste. Simons—and Way,” to two of his men, “relieve those gentlemen of their swords. A thousand thanks, gentlemen,” as the Spaniards surrendered their weapons. “Now do me the favour to accompany me; and please remember that any man who attempts to escape will instantly be shot down.”

So saying, George, with his drawn sword in his right hand and his left resting suggestively upon the butt of one of the pistols that adorned his belt, led the way toward the little settlement, wondering meanwhile what could possibly be the explanation of certain whiffs of a singularly vile and offensive odour which now and then assailed his nostrils when there occurred an occasional flaw in the trade-wind which was sweeping briskly over the island. He might, of course, have asked, but the thought occurred to him that by doing so he might perhaps be betraying his ignorance, and so lay himself open to the chance of being misled upon a matter that might very well be of importance. A little later on he was very glad that he had held his peace.

A walk of a few minutes' duration brought the party to the settlement, whereupon George called a halt and directed three of his men to follow him into the first house they came to, and the rest to keep a wary eye upon the prisoners. The building was a small wooden affair, consisting of three rooms only, two of which were sleeping apartments, while the third was furnished with a table, a sideboard, a couch, and a few chairs, and was evidently used as a sitting-room. There was nobody in the house, but upon passing through it to the rear they discovered a small detached structure, the odours proceeding from which seemed to suggest that it was being used as a kitchen. There they found a young Indian woman bending over a fire and preparing a savoury mess of some sort; and it was not without difficulty that they at length made her understand she was a prisoner, and must abandon her cookery and accompany them. In like manner they visited all the remaining houses of the settlement, collecting altogether two white women and some twenty blacks, as well as a priest, the whole of whom, together with their other prisoners, they unceremoniously

marched to the little church, locking them therein, and so making prisoners of every soul in the settlement. Then, having posted half a dozen men round the church, to see that nobody broke out, George led the way to the big shed, which was the most conspicuous building in the settlement. Entering it, he found that it was divided into two unequal compartments, the smaller of which contained a few casks of wine, a few bales of cloth of different kinds, and a miscellaneous assortment of goods, evidently intended for the use of the settlers. Then, passing from this into the larger compartment, he at once became aware of a faint suggestion of the same peculiar and offensive odour that had assailed his nostrils while walking up from the beach, and, looking more closely, he found that it proceeded from an enormous heap of something piled high against the further wall, which, upon investigation, he found to be a kind of oyster-shell, the interior of which was more or less thickly coated with a beautiful white, iridescent substance. At once he understood the meaning of everything. Those shells were shells of the pearl oyster; the settlement was a subsidiary pearl-fishing station; and the odour which had so offended him was the odour of decaying oysters laid out to rot in the sun in order that the pearls might be extracted without injury from the dead fish. And it had apparently dawned upon somebody that the shells, as well as the pearls, possessed a market value, and this was where they were being stored after being cleansed from the decayed fish.

But if that enormous heap consisted entirely of pearl oyster-shells, as it unquestionably did, where were the pearls that had been extracted from them? George glanced round the sombre interior, lighted by only one open aperture guarded by a heavily framed shutter, and saw two large boxes dimly revealed in one shadowy corner of the store. He strode across to these, and, flinging them open, stood transfixed with amazement; for one box—the larger of the two—was three-fourths full of small pearls of the kind usually known as seed pearls, while the other was nearly half full of lovely gems of the most exquisite satiny whiteness, ranging in size from that of a small pea up to beauties as big as the top of a man's thumb! What their value might be he had not the vaguest idea, but there were hundreds of them; ay, possibly a thousand or more, and he knew instinctively that if he never laid hands upon another particle of booty, the contents of those two boxes would pay the whole cost of the expedition and leave a very handsome margin over for prize money. The boxes were iron-bound, and were furnished with stout lids which were capable of being secured by means of strong padlocks which hung in the hasps, with the keys still in them. So, having satisfied his curiosity by closely examining a few of the finer specimens, George closed and locked both boxes, slipped the keys into his pocket, and then, going to the door, called to eight of his men, and, indicating the boxes, instructed the seamen to carry them down to the boats forthwith. Then, waiting until he had seen the task accomplished, he walked to the church door, unlocked and threw it open, and announced to the prisoners that they were now free to come forth and proceed about their business, adding that if they would walk down to the beach after he and his men were gone they would find their swords left for them upon the sand. This done, he gave orders for the men to march down to the boats, himself bringing up the rear.

As George quite expected, the cavalier in gorget and headpiece, who had met the Englishmen upon their arrival, and who seemed to be the officer in charge of the settlement, no sooner found himself free than he proceeded straight to the big shed, entered it, and a moment later re-appeared and came running after the retiring Englishmen.

“Señor,” he cried, as soon as he arrived within speaking distance, “you have taken our pearls, the proceeds of the entire fishing season up to the present, and the loss of them will mean to me irreparable ruin. I beg you to return them to me, señor, and in acknowledgment of your courtesy I pledge you the honour of a Spanish gentleman that I will remain silent as to your visit to this island. Otherwise I promise you that I will immediately spread the news of your presence in these waters, and of your atrocious act of piracy, throughout the length and breadth of the Spanish Main, with the result that you will be hunted by every Spanish ship of war in the Caribbean Sea, with consequences to yourself and your piratical crew which I leave to your own imagination to picture. Come, señor, I beg you to think better of this, and to return the pearls to me. You will find it pay you far better in the long run.”

“Señor,” retorted George, “if I understand you aright, you would buy back your pearls at the expense of your own countrymen in the various settlements scattered along the coast, by leaving them unwarned of my presence in these seas, so that I may have the opportunity to fall upon them unawares. If you are sincere in making this proposal, señor cavalier, you are a traitor to your own countrymen; if not, you have it in your mind to betray me and my crew. In either case your proposal smacks of treachery, and I will have none of it. Now, mark you this, señor. You are at perfect liberty to take whatever steps you please to warn your countrymen of my presence in the region which Spain arrogantly claims as exclusively her own. And you will be doing your compatriots a service by acquainting them with the reason for my presence here.

“Last year Captain Hawkins, my countryman, had occasion to put into San Juan de Ulua in distress. He entered into a solemn covenant and agreement with Don Martin Enriquez, the new Viceroy of Mexico, whereby the English were to be permitted to refit their ships in peace, without let or hindrance from the Spaniards. Yet, despite this covenant, the Spaniards most shamefully and treacherously attacked the English at the very moment when they were least capable of defending themselves, with the result that many of my countrymen were slain—*murdered*, señor, is the right word—and many others taken prisoners, my brother, Mr Hubert Saint Leger, among them. Now, my business here is to rescue that gentleman, and to exact reparation for his imprisonment and such hardships and suffering as he may have been called upon to endure in consequence of the treachery of the Spaniards. My first act, in pursuance of this policy, is the seizure of your pearls. If by any chance you happen to know anything of my brother's whereabouts, you will be rendering your countrymen a signal service by imparting such information to me. For I intend to carry fire and sword throughout the Main until I have found my brother and exacted reparation; and when I have done that, my ravages will cease. If you can tell me where my brother is to be found, I will proceed thither direct, and spare your other towns. If not, I shall attack each as I come to it. Now, can you tell me where I shall be most likely to find my brother?”

“No, señor Englishman, I cannot,” answered the Spaniard; “nor would I if I could. Your brother is no doubt long since dead, probably at the hands of the Inquisition. It is into its hands that heretics generally fall. Go your way, señor pirate, go your way to the fate that awaits you, and do your worst. I look to have the pleasure of seeing you publicly burnt alive in the square of one of our cities ere long.” And the Spaniard turned upon his heel and left George standing there, in a tumult of feeling too complex for description. But he did not stand long, for his men had

continued on their way down to the boats, and were now waiting for him to rejoin them, which he did without further waste of time.

Upon the arrival of the boats alongside they were at once hoisted in, after which the two chests of pearls were taken out of them and carefully deposited below then the anchor was hove up to the bows, and the *Nonsuch* once more got under way. The distance from the island which they had just left—and which they incontinently called “Pearl Islet,” but which they afterwards learned was named Coche Island—was not far, being a mere matter of some seven miles and when they arrived within a mile of the rock-studded coast the ship was kept away before the wind, and Dyer ascended to the foretop, taking with him a “perspective glass,” or telescope, belonging to George, in order that he might the better be able to find the harbour of which he was in search. And after remaining there nearly an hour and a half he found what he wanted, namely, a low point covered with coconut trees backed up with thick palmetto scrub, with an opening to the westward of it beyond which rose three peaks. This opening was the mouth of the harbour which he was seeking, and a most unpromising-looking place it was, for there was white water stretching apparently right across it, showing that the approach to the harbour was guarded by a reef or bar of some sort. But Dyer knew what he was about; he had already been in that harbour once, and he was aware that somewhere in that barrier, if he could only find it, there was a channel, narrow, it is true, but nevertheless wide enough and deep enough to allow the passage of an even bigger ship than the *Nonsuch*. And if he wished for confirmation of such knowledge, there it was before his eyes, in the shape of the upper spars of a ship showing above the top of the coco palms, the distance apart of the spars indicating that the craft to which they belonged was at least as big as the English ship, if not a trifle bigger.

It was not, however, until the *Nonsuch* arrived immediately opposite the opening that Dyer was able, with the assistance of the perspective glass, to pick up the little narrow streak of unbroken water in the midst of the flashing surf which marked the channel through the reef, and from his lofty perch he immediately shouted down the necessary orders to George, who stood aft upon the poop, and who in his turn repeated them to the mariners, whereupon the ship was brought to the wind and, under the pilot’s directions, headed straight for the passage. Then Dyer communicated the further information that there was a large ship lying at anchor in the harbour; upon hearing which Saint Leger, after demanding and receiving certain further information, gave orders for the ordnance, great and small, to be loaded, and for the crew to arm themselves and stand ready for any emergency.

The *Nonsuch*, when brought to the wind, was within two miles of the shore; a quarter of an hour later, therefore, found her sliding in through the short, narrow passage of clear water, with the surf pounding and thundering and churning in great spaces of white froth on either hand. Then, suddenly, the commotion receded on the quarters and the adventurers found themselves in a gulf some eight miles long, running due east and west, and so narrow that there was only barely width enough in it for a ship of size like the *Nonsuch* to turn to windward in it—as she must do in order to reach the settlement, some three miles to the eastward, off which the strange ship rode at anchor. The water inside this gulf was almost glass-smooth, being to a considerable extent sheltered from the trade-wind by the high land to the eastward, and Dyer, still occupying his coign of vantage in the foretop, perceived to his amazement, that while the spit on the south side of the gulf gradually widened out as the land trended eastward, the island, at this particular part of it, was so narrow that the gulf was only separated from the sea to the northward by a spit so attenuated that he could see the Caribbean across it less than three miles away. This narrow northern spit was also quite low, fringed with coconut palms, and covered with low, dense scrub, as was the southern spit for a distance of some two miles, while the land to the east and west of the gulf rose up in a series of lofty peaks, tree-crowned to their summits, the vegetation seeming to consist mostly of ceibas, palms, bois immortelles, bamboo, tree ferns, calabash trees, crimson-hued hibiscus, and other tropical trees, gorgeous now with multi-coloured blossoms, the whole presenting a most beautiful and delectable picture as it shimmered under the rays of the mid-day sun.

But there was one part of the scene which was not quite so delectable, and that was a spot some three miles up the gulf, where rode at anchor a race-ship quite as large as, if not something larger than, the *Nonsuch*. She was surrounded by boats, to the number of twenty or more, into which she was discharging cargo which the boats were conveying to the shore for disposal in certain sheds forming part of a settlement at least four times as large as that on Coche Island. It was a busy scene, some ninety or a hundred men being engaged upon the wharf and about the warehouses, in addition to those in the boats and aboard the ship. Moreover, the *Nonsuch* was scarcely clear of the channel through the reef, when the red and gold banner of Spain was hoisted upon the flagstaff aboard the other ship, and on a flagstaff ashore, which was of course a polite hint to the new arrival to display her colours in turn. There was therefore very little prospect of the English being able to effect anything in the nature of a surprise, unless they chose to cloak their real character under a display of false colours, and this young Saint Leger positively refused to do. Instead he ordered the white flag bearing the crimson Cross of Saint George—which was at that time the ensign of England—to be bent on to the ensign halliards, but not to be hoisted until he gave the word, since there was no sense in prematurely alarming the enemy if it could be avoided.

The enemy, however, in this case, promised to be less easily hoodwinked than their compatriots over on Coche Island; at all events their suspicions were more readily awakened, for when, after an interval of about five minutes, the *Nonsuch* still delayed to show her colours, the race-ship fired an unshotted gun by way of calling attention to the invitation implied in the display of her own colours and when this hint also was ignored signs of intense activity began to immediately manifest themselves aboard the ship and at the settlement, the boats alongside the Spaniard hurriedly casting off and pulling for the wharf, while the race-ship’s rigging and yards suddenly grew thick and dark with men hastening aloft to loose her canvas.

“The Don’s goin’ to get under way, Cap’n, I du believe,” hailed Dyer from the foretop where he was still perched. “Do ‘e see his men swarmin’ aloft?”

“Ay, ay; I see them,” answered George. “Well, let him come, if so be he will. I would rather fight him here than where he is now, where he could receive the support of his friends. Do you see any sign of galleys anywhere about, Mr Dyer?” Dyer took a long, searching look through his glass, and at length reported that nothing of the kind was to be seen.

"Good!" returned George. "Then our first fight promises to be one of fair play and no favour—that is to say, if the fellow means to fight and not to attempt to slip away, which we must take care that he does not do. Mr Dyer, you may come down as soon as the Spaniard is fairly under way, for I shall want you to help me fight the ship. Now, men of Devon," he continued, turning to the crew, who had of their own accord and without waiting for orders gone to their stations, "we shall soon be fighting our first fight. Show these haughty Spaniards what you can do, in such fashion that the *Nonsuch* shall soon become a name of fear throughout the length and breadth of the Spanish Main. Stand to your ordnance, lads; keep cool; and take good aim."

The *Nonsuch* had tacked twice, working to windward up the narrow channel, when Dyer shouted the news that the Spanish ship had apparently slipped her cable, and was under way, running down toward them; and he followed up the news by descending the fore-rigging and making his way aft, where he stationed himself on the poop beside George, in readiness to supervise the working of the ship while the latter fought her.

The two men had only time to exchange a few hurried words together when the Spanish ship was seen to windward, coming down toward them under full sail. And a gallant sight she looked, with her brightly-painted hull, her big gilded figure-head and head rails flashing in the sun, her mastheads and yard-arms bedizened with banner and pennons streaming in the breeze, and her painted sails bellying and straining at yard and stay with the warm breathing of the trade-wind. She was still some two miles distant, and it would be at least ten minutes before she arrived within gunshot.

"Pilot," said George, turning to Dyer, after he had eyed the stranger carefully, "let the mariners clew up and furl our topgallants. I believe we can do without them, by the look of yonder ship, which seems to be not nearly so fast as ourselves, and there will be the less tackle for the men to handle when it comes to manoeuvring, and consequently the more men free to fight."

The order was given; the men sprang to the topgallant halliards and sheets, cast them off, manned the clewlines and buntlines, and clewed up the topgallants. Then a dozen of them—six forward and six aft—leapt into the rigging, clambered it with the alacrity of squirrels, neatly furled the sails, and were on their way down again from aloft when the first gun from the Spaniard boomed out across the still waters of the channel, to be echoed a little later by the distant hills. The shot flew wide, striking the water nearly a hundred fathoms away on the *Nonsuch's* lee bow.

"Now," cried George, turning to a man who had for some time been standing by the ensign staff, "you may hoist away and let the Dons see with whom they are about to fight." And in obedience to his command the glorious Red Cross on its white field floated out over the taffrail and went soaring majestically to the head of the staff, to be greeted with cheer after cheer by the crew.

The *Nonsuch* was now on the starboard tack, heading to the northward, and it looked as though the Spaniard meditated crossing her stern and raking her at close quarters as she crossed. To counter this manoeuvre, therefore, Dyer gave the order "Ready about!" and as the sail-trimmers sprang to their stations, George shouted an order to the gunners of the starboard battery to be ready to fire at the word of command. The men accordingly blew their smouldering matches vigorously, again looked to the priming of their ordnance, and held themselves ready to discharge at the word. Up swept the *Nonsuch* into the wind, with all her sails ashiver in the brisk breeze, and, watching carefully, George gave the order to fire at the exact moment when the Spanish ship was square abeam. The Spaniard discharged her broadside at the same instant, and immediately succeeding the thunder of the two broadsides those on board the *Nonsuch* heard the distant thud of their pounding shot and the crackling crash of splintering spars; and, looking eagerly in the direction of the Spanish ship, they saw that they had shot away her foremast and bowsprit, both of which were in the very act of falling. So they raised three joyous cheers and fell to loading their pieces again, while their comrades, who had not yet fired, looked to see where the Spanish shot had gone. But, with the exception of two holes in the *Nonsuch's* mainsail, and a severed brace dangling from the fore-topsail yardarm, no damage was discoverable, whereat they cheered again.

The Spanish ship continued to forge ahead on her original course for a distance of a few fathoms, and then the wreck of her foremast and bowsprit, towing alongside and still attached to her hull by the standing and running rigging, dragged her head round to starboard, whereupon she instantly broached to. Meanwhile the *Nonsuch*, having stayed, was paying off on the larboard tack, the relative positions of the two ships being such that a collision seemed imminent. George saw that the situation was such as to demand instant decision, and he immediately made up his mind what to do.

"Keep her away, Mr Dyer," he commanded, "and run alongside the enemy to leeward. Keep your head sail aback to deaden our way, or we shall never get the grapnels to hold. Stand by there to larboard to heave your grappling irons. Archers and musketeers, discharge me a volley upon the decks of yonder ship; and, gunners of the larboard battery, be ready to fire a broadside of ordnance, great and small, into her at the moment when you feel us touch. Then, boarders, be ready to follow me." And he drew his sword.

The next moment a shower of arrows and musket balls swept the decks of the stranger with devastating effect, as might be gathered from the chorus of shrieks and yells of anguish that arose from the deck of the Spaniard. An answering volley was instantly returned by the enemy, but it was wild, straggling, and feeble, bearing eloquent testimony to the state of confusion that already prevailed on board her, and which did little harm; and this state of confusion was further demonstrated by the sight of an officer on her poop waving his sword violently and shouting orders to which nobody seemed to pay the slightest attention. A minute later the hulls of the two ships crashed together, the grappling irons were thrown at the precise instant that the *Nonsuch* poured a destructive broadside into her antagonist, and before the ships had time to recoil from the impact, George, at the head of some fifty boarders, leapt from the one ship to the other, and the party proceeded to lay about them with sword, pike, and musket butt with such fell determination that after a few seconds' resistance on the part of the Spaniards the latter flung down their weapons and called for quarter.



George turned to the officer, who had now descended from the poop to the main deck and was valiantly fighting, single-handed, with his back to the front of the poop cabins, and cried to him:

“Do you surrender, señor?”

“I will, if you will promise me good *guerra*, señor,” replied the Spaniard, dexterously parrying the thrust of a pikeman and running his antagonist neatly through the shoulder.

“Then stop, men; hold your hands, and leave this cavalier to me,” cried George, dashing in and striking up the points of the English weapons that still threatened the Spaniard. Then, as the men drew sullenly and unwillingly back, the young captain advanced, with lowered point, and his left hand held out. “Your sword, señor,” he demanded. “On the word of an Englishman, I promise you *buena guerra*.”

Whereupon the Don, taking his sword by the point, tendered it, hilt first, with a bow, to George, who tucked it under his left arm, bowing in turn as he received it. And so the *Santa Maria*, fifty tons bigger than the *Nonsuch*, and carrying even more guns, with a crew which, at the beginning of the action, had numbered one hundred and thirty, became the first prize of George’s prowess and that of the Devon mastiffs.

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## Chapter Six.

### How they came to a desert island and buried their treasure.

The ships being still held fast together by the chains of the grappling irons, and driving slowly down the channel before the wind, George first ordered the *Nonsuch* to be brought to an anchor; and when this was done he further instructed Dyer to take steps for the effectual securing of the unwounded prisoners, and the tending of the wounded on both sides. Then, inviting the officer who had surrendered to him—and whom he rightly assumed to be the captain of the prize—to accompany him into the state cabin of the captured ship, he formally introduced himself as Señor Don George Saint Leger, an Englishman, and captain of the ship *Nonsuch*; the stranger returning the compliment by explaining that he was Señor Don Pasquale Alfonso Maria Francisco of Albuquerque, a servant of his Most Catholic Majesty, Philip of Spain, and commander of the ship *Santa Maria*, dispatched from Cadiz by his Majesty to convey munitions of various descriptions to his Majesty’s possessions in the Western Indies. And when requested to specify more particularly of what those munitions consisted, Don Pasquale, etcetera, etcetera, mentioned wines, cloths, silk, and brocades of various descriptions, salt, leather, articles of furniture, arms and ammunition, and—he hesitated, whereupon George gently invited him to complete his enumeration.

“Before I do so, señor,” remarked Don Pasquale, “I should like to ask what you intend to do with my ship, now that you have captured her.”

“Assuredly,” answered George. “I had quite intended to tell you, even if you had not asked for the information. My purpose in coming to this part of the world is to seek my brother, who was last year captured by your countrymen at San Juan de Ulua, when, by order of Don Martin Enriquez, they treacherously attacked the squadron of the English admiral, John Hawkins, while he was peacefully refitting his ships, under an agreement whereby they were to be permitted to do so without let, hindrance, or interference of any kind. My brother, Don Hubert Saint Leger, is still a prisoner in the hands of your countrymen. My intention is to secure his release, if he is still alive; and to exact heavy compensation for his detention—and any discomfort or suffering to which he may have been subjected; or, if he is dead, to wreak my vengeance upon his slayers. Therefore, señor, you will be rendering your countrymen a service—when I have released you—by informing them of my purpose, and saying, further, that as soon as I have found my brother, or had him restored to me, I will hold my hand and leave these shores; but until then I will ravage the Spanish Main from end to end. Thus, you—and your countrymen also, I hope—will see that it is to the interest of every Spaniard in the Indies to find my brother and restore him to me, alive and unhurt, as quickly as possible. And do not forget to lay full emphasis upon the words ‘alive and unhurt,’ señor, because if he has been slain, or even injured in any way, I will exact such terrible reparation as shall linger in the memory of Spaniards for many a long year. It is in pursuance of my policy of exacting reparation for my brother’s detention that I have captured your ship. I shall take from her whatever I may find aboard her that will be of use to me; and, that done, I shall land you all here on the island of Margarita, and either sink or burn the *Santa Maria*.”

“I presume, señor, from what you say, that you hold a commission from the Queen of England, and that it is she who has dispatched you upon your mission of retribution, in revenge for the attack upon her ships at San Juan de Ulua. Is that so?” demanded Don Pasquale.

“No, señor, it is not so,” answered George. “The Queen of England knows nothing of this expedition, which is entirely a private venture of my own.”

“And the señor holds no commission?” continued the Don.

“No commission save what is conferred by this,” answered George, touching his sword.

“Then it would appear that I have fallen into the hands of a common pirate, señor,” remarked Don Pasquale through his teeth.

“If you choose to so regard me,” answered George.

“*Bueno!*” remarked the Spaniard. “Then I shall know what to do. There is no question of how I choose to regard you, señor. You hold no commission from your Queen, yet you have dared to make war upon the lieges of his Most Catholic Majesty. Therefore you are a pirate, neither more nor less. And as soon as it pleases you to release me I

shall make the best of my way to the Main, there to warn my countrymen of your presence upon the coast, and your alleged object. And you may rest assured, señor, that within a month from this time every Spanish ship in these seas will be on the look-out for you. Your career of piracy will then soon be cut short; and I shall live in the hope of seeing you hanged as a warning and example to all other pirates."

"That is as may be," retorted George. "You may be assured, Don Pasquale, that I did not enter upon this expedition without a full realisation of all the risks which it involved. Let me again impress upon you the urgency of remembering the words *alive and unhurt* in relation to my brother, when you make your report; for if anything has been allowed to happen to him, I will hold responsible every Spaniard who falls into my hands. By the way, was there not something that you were about to add when you were enumerating the items of your ship's cargo?"

"There was, señor," answered Don Pasquale, "but I was then under the impression that I had fallen into the hands of a fellow soldier. But now that I find my captor to be merely a common pirate, it is not consonant with my honour to afford you any further information."

"As you please, señor," answered George, in nowise ruffled by the Don's reiteration of the term "pirate," which in those days carried nothing like the opprobrious signification that it bears to-day. "It matters not; for I shall cause your ship to be thoroughly searched from stem to stern before I destroy her. But as you seem to be imbued with so very strong an animus against me, I must put you in confinement while your ship is being searched, lest you should feel tempted to do something which you would afterwards be sorry for." So saying, young Saint Leger threw open the door of a state-room in the lock of which he observed a key and, signing to the Spaniard to enter, closed the door and locked the man in, much to the haughty Don's undisguised disgust. Then, having first called in a man from the deck to stand sentry over the door, he went out on deck to see how matters were proceeding there.

He found that the task of separating the wounded from the dead and the disposal of the former as comfortably as might be on board the ships to which they respectively belonged, was upon the eve of completion, whereupon, after giving Dyer certain further orders, George called to Heard, the purser, and a couple of seamen, to accompany him, and again entering the cabin of the prize, proceeded to subject it to a thorough systematic search, beginning with the captain's own private state-room. Here, as George quite expected, they found, in a locked desk, a large number of documents, including bills of lading, official instructions, and so on; and among the latter a paper authorising Don Pasquale to deliver over to Don Martin Enriquez, the Viceroy of Mexico, at San Juan de Ulua, the sum of one hundred thousand gold pezos, to be used for payment of the troops and the expenses connected with the government of the country. This was a prize indeed worth having, and George at once proceeded to the cabin in which the Don was confined, and apprising him of the discovery of the document, demanded to be informed where the money was to be found. But the Don flatly refused to supply the information, admitting indeed that the treasure was aboard the ship, but assuring George that it was so carefully concealed that no one but himself would ever be able to lay hands upon it. Whereupon George locked the door again, slipped the key in his pocket, and sent for the carpenter and carpenter's mate of the *Nonsuch*, with instructions to come aboard the prize forthwith, bringing with them their tools.

George had a very shrewd suspicion that the money was concealed somewhere down in the run of the ship, that being the part of a vessel where treasure was usually stored, because there it would be under the immediate care of the officers and quite out of reach of the crew; as soon, therefore, as the carpenter and his mate joined them, the search party entered the ship's lazarette and completely cleared it, sending all the stores up on deck. Then, not finding any traces of the money, they tore up the temporary decking, and not to dwell unduly upon this incident, at length found the treasure, in ten stout, iron-bound cases, very cunningly stowed away in a secret chamber constructed right down alongside the ship's keelson. It was a difficult job to get the cases on deck, they being heavy, and the space in which they were stowed very confined; but, of course, they managed it at last, and late in the afternoon the whole was transferred to the *Nonsuch* and safely stowed away in her treasure-room. Meanwhile, Dyer had not been idle; and when the transfer of the treasure had been effected, and George was free to attend to other matters, the pilot reported that all the arms, ammunition, and certain pieces of ordnance, had been removed from the *Santa Maria*, as well as the large quantity of wine, provisions, rope, canvas, and other matters that might possibly prove useful in the future, and that—subject of course to George's approval—the prize might now be abandoned. Whereupon, after carefully perusing Dyer's detailed list of the matters transferred, George issued orders that the boats of both ships were to be lowered and the prisoners, wounded and unwounded, sent down into them, after which the flotilla proceeded, under a flag of truce, to the settlement, some two miles to windward, where the Spaniards were landed. There was a tense moment when, as the flotilla approached the wharf, a body of armed men, numbering about a hundred, suddenly swung into view from behind a cluster of buildings and marched down toward the wharf as though intending to dispute the landing. But when George, in his gig, pulled fearlessly ahead until he arrived within hail—and within musket-shot—and announced the object of his coming, adding that, if any treachery were attempted, his ship would bombard and utterly destroy the settlement, the armed men were hurriedly marched back again out of sight, and the landing of the prisoners was accomplished without difficulty or interference.

By the time that the boats got alongside again, after landing the prisoners, the sun was within an hour of setting, and if the adventurers desired to reach the open sea again before nightfall—as they most assuredly did—it was time to bestir themselves. George, therefore, issued his orders, and while one party of his now pretty well exhausted crew manned the capstan and proceeded to get the *Nonsuch's* anchor, a second were set to work to pass a towing hawser aboard the prize and make it fast; after which the ships got under way, the *Santa Maria* being in tow of the *Nonsuch*, and safely accomplished the passage of the reef just as the sun's upper rim was disappearing beneath the western horizon in a flaming glory of gold and crimson. Then, as soon as the ships had secured an offing of some three miles, rendering it exceedingly unlikely that the prize would drive ashore and again fall into the hands of her former crew, she was effectually set fire to and abandoned. This done, the exhausted crew were sent below to get a good substantial meal, and the deck was left practically in charge of the officers, the helmsman and a couple of hands to keep a look-out being air of the crew who were required to keep the deck until the regular night watches should be resumed.

This opportunity was seized by George to explain to the officers his more immediate plans. He reminded them that

the primary object of the expedition was to rescue his brother from the Spaniards, and pointed out to them that since the stroke of good fortune which had fallen to their lot, that day, had made them masters of enough booty to ensure the financial success of the expedition, there was now no reason why the great object of the voyage should be further delayed, and intimated his intention of heading the ship directly for San Juan de Ulua. And this was at once agreed to, if not exactly cheerfully, at least with a fairly good grace; for there were some on board the *Nonsuch* who, having seen how apparently easy it was to obtain rich booty, would fain have had the ship proceed leisurely along the coast, touching at La Guaira, Porto Cabello, La Hacha, Santa Marta, Cartagena—in fact at every spot along the Main where the Spaniards had established themselves, holding the towns to ransom and acquiring all the booty possible while working their way westward. But George would have none of it, he had already acquired quite as much booty as he desired to possess at that moment; for he wanted to keep his men keen, and he knew that nothing saps a man's courage more, and makes him less willing to engage in a desperate enterprise, than the possession of ample means, and he feared that if he acquired too much treasure before he had succeeded in finding and rescuing his brother, the crew might insist upon abandoning the quest and returning home to enjoy the fruit of their spoils. Therefore, as soon as the south-western extremity of Margarita was cleared, the ship's head was hauled up to west-north-west for the northern extremity of the peninsula of Yucatan.

On the following forenoon a small island, the northern extremity of which was studded with numerous outlying rocks, was sighted ahead, and passed, close to the northward, about an hour before noon; and late on in the afternoon another and somewhat larger island, grouped about with innumerable rocky satellites, was sighted and passed to larboard. Then nothing more was seen until, on the fifth day out from Margarita, about an hour before midnight, the alarm was suddenly raised that broken water appeared ahead, and the ship was quickly brought to the wind, on the starboard tack, just in time to avoid plunging headlong upon a reef projecting from the northern extremity of a small island, of the existence of which Dyer declared himself to be utterly ignorant. Luckily for the adventurers, there was a half-moon riding high in the sky, which, together with the highly phosphorescent state of the sea, and the admirable look-out which was being maintained by George's orders, enabled them to detect the danger in time to avoid it.

Hastily summoned from his bunk, upon the occurrence of the emergency, George ascended to the poop, and carefully surveyed the situation. To the northward there appeared what looked like the loom of high land, but if it was what it appeared to be, it was sufficiently distant to be of no immediate consequence, and the young commander scarcely favoured it with a second glance; it was his immediate surroundings that most insistently claimed his immediate attention, for as a matter of fact the ship had blundered up against what is now known as the Pedro Bank and its cays, and there the latter lay, not more than a mile to leeward of the ship, which was already in discoloured water, with the sea breaking heavily at no great distance to the north of her and all round four small islets within easy distance of each other. Fortunately, the weather was fine, and a very brief study of the situation sufficed to convince Saint Leger that the ship was not in any danger, now that the islands had been seen and timely measures taken to avoid running upon them. But the sight of them had crystallised in his mind an idea that had been floating there during the last few days, ever since they had left Margarita, indeed, and he issued orders for sail to be reduced, and for the ship to dodge to and fro to windward of the islets, keeping them in sight until the morning. For he had suddenly made up his mind to devote a few hours to the examination of these islets by daylight, with the object of determining their suitability as a hiding-place for the treasure which he now had on board. He regarded it as altogether too valuable to be risked in a fight with its accompanying possibilities of capture, and he felt convinced, from occasional remarks which had reached his ears, that all hands would fight with greater freedom, and much easier minds, if they felt that, in the event of a reverse, their loss would be confined to that of the ship, and possibly their own freedom—strange to say, they were quite willing to risk the latter, convinced that if they fell into the hands of the enemy their loss of freedom would be but temporary, but if they chanced to lose the treasure it would be gone for ever.

Accordingly the ship dodged off and on during the remaining hours of the night, and at daybreak George was called, and at once proceeded into the foretop, accompanied by Dyer, where the pair again carefully reconnoitred their surroundings. From this elevation it was seen that the four islets occupied the south-eastern extremity of a shoal, or bank, of somewhat irregular shape, widening out from a point at its eastern extremity, to a width of some twenty-five miles at the spot occupied by the islets, and stretching away in a westerly direction to the very verge of the horizon, and possibly farther still. The four islets lay in a group, about four miles apart, nearly equidistant from each other, and ran in a direction approximately North-North-East, and South-South-West, the most southerly islet standing quite close to the edge of the shoal. The one next it to the northward, which was the largest of them all, was only a very small affair, being about half a mile long by about a quarter of a mile broad. But it was the northernmost islet that chiefly appealed to George. All of them were low and shaggy with stunted bush, but this one stood higher out of the water than any of the others, being some twelve or fifteen feet high at its highest part; moreover it had a few coconut trees upon it, which the others had not, and the young captain was quick to see how usefully these might be employed as landmarks in the event of his determining to bury the treasure there. Accordingly, as soon as he and his companion had familiarised themselves with the features of the place, George descended to the deck and took command of the ship, leaving Dyer perched aloft to act as pilot and con the ship to her anchorage. Half an hour later the *Nonsuch*, having slid round the tail of a reef that jutted out about half a mile from the southern extremity of the island, clewed up her canvas and came to an anchor at a distance of less than a quarter of a mile from the beautifully smooth, sandy beach, and all hands went below to breakfast.

As George more than half-expected, there was a very marked disposition to murmur and to betray strong dissatisfaction when it came to be known that the captain had called a halt at this little group of desolate, uninteresting islets with the express object of burying the rich booty that had been so easily acquired, some of the malcontents going so far as to express aloud their firm conviction that when once the islets had been lost sight of it would be impossible to ever find them again. And such a fear was by no means ill-founded, for it must be remembered that when George Saint Leger embarked upon his great adventure the science of navigation was in a very different condition from what it now is. Latitude was only determinable very roughly by means of one or another of two crude instruments, one of which was called the *astrolabe* and the other the *cross staff*, while there was no method of determining the longitude at all, save by what is now known as the "dead reckoning," that is to say, a

more or less careful record of the courses steered and the distances sailed; hence when mariners ventured out of sight of land their only means of reaching any desired point was to sail north or south until they reached the latitude of their port, and then steer east or west, as the case might be, until they arrived at their destination, this plan being further complicated by the intrusion of obstacles in the shape of headlands and what not in the way. But George Saint Leger happened to be better equipped in this respect than perhaps any other man of his time; for as has already been mentioned, he was a lad of ideas, and one of those ideas was that there ought to be some way of ascertaining the longitude of a ship, if one could but hit upon it; and further, that such a way having been found, a mariner might fearlessly venture out of sight of land, remain out of sight of it as long as he pleased, and go whither he pleased, with the certainty of being able to find his way back again. Then, with this postulate firmly fixed in his mind, he had set himself to work in his leisure time to thrash out the question of accurately determining the longitude of an unknown place in relation to a known place. He was convinced that the world was round, globular in shape, although there were many learned men who disputed this assertion, and he also knew that the world revolved on its own axis once in twenty-four hours. Also he knew that when the sun, in the course of its apparent passage round the earth, attained its highest point in the heavens, it was noon at that place, and his astrolabe afforded him the means of determining that moment. Then, still following the train of thought connected with the earth's diurnal revolution upon its axis whereby the sun was brought to the meridian every day at noon, he had not much difficulty in reasoning out the fact that it cannot possibly be noon at any two or more places at the same moment unless they happen to be situated on the same meridian, or, in other words, are of the same longitude. From this to the assurance that the difference in time between any two places was equivalent to the difference in longitude between them was an easy step, and led naturally enough to the next, which was that, if he happened to possess a time-piece showing, say, the time at Plymouth, he could, by comparing this with the moment of noon somewhere else, as ascertained by his astrolabe, determine the exact distance of that place east or west of Plymouth. The rest was easy; he went to a certain watchmaker in London and ordered the best watch that could be made for money, the cost of it absorbing most of his savings; and this watch, carefully regulated and rated, showing Plymouth time, he took with him when he embarked upon his great adventure in the *Nonsuch*, and by means of it he had succeeded in ascertaining pretty accurately the longitude of Barbados, Trinidad, and Margarita, and intended also to ascertain the longitude of the islet upon which he proposed to bury his treasure. All this he explained to his crew as well as he could drive so abstruse a matter into their thick heads, and although it is more than doubtful whether any of them understood his explanation, they understood at least that "the Cap'n" was assuring them that he possessed some occult means of finding the islets again, and with that they were fain to be satisfied. It never occurred to them, poor souls, that if the captain lost his watch, or allowed it to run down, his means of finding the islets again would be gone, otherwise it is exceedingly unlikely that they would ever have agreed to his taking the risk.

As soon as breakfast was over, one of the boats was lowered, and George, accompanied by half a dozen men provided with pickaxes and shovels, went ashore, to prepare a suitable hiding-place for the treasure, while Dyer, and Heard, the purser, assisted by the sailmaker, swathed the chest containing the pearls in several folds of tarred canvas, the outer coat of all being thickly smeared with pitch, in order to preserve the delicate gems from injury through being buried in more or less damp earth. The shore party had no difficulty in selecting a suitable spot for the burial, the precise point being determinable again at any time by a series of carefully taken and equally carefully recorded cross bearings; and by the time that a hole of suitable dimensions and depth had been excavated, a signal was flying on board the *Nonsuch* that all the preparations there had been completed and that the treasure was ready for removal, with the result that before the arrival of mid-day the whole of the treasure was safely deposited in its hiding-place, the soil shovelled back into the hole and well rammed down, and all traces of the excavation carefully obliterated. Then all hands returned to the ship just in time for George to make his noontide observations for the determination of the position of the islets. The anchor was then hove up and the *Nonsuch* stood out to sea again, while, despite their captain's assurances to the contrary, most of the crew were more than half convinced that they would never again set eyes upon the treasure which they had taken so much trouble to put out of sight.

Three uneventful days later land was sighted on the larboard bow, and late in the afternoon the headland at the north-eastern extremity of Yucatan peninsula was passed at a distance of some twelve miles, and the course was altered to due west for the run along the northern coast of the peninsula. It was near this spot that, just a year earlier, the squadron under Captain Hawkins' command had encountered the two successive hurricanes which had played such havoc with them as to compel them to run to San Juan de Ulua to refit, with the result that irremediable disaster had overtaken them; and Dyer, who had looked forward with considerable trepidation to the time when he would again be called upon to sail those treacherous seas, was loud in his thanksgivings for the good fortune which had thus far attended them, for nothing could be more satisfactory and delightful than the weather which the voyagers were now experiencing, the only drawback to their content being an unaccountably heavy sea into which they ran about midnight, and which Dyer was inclined to regard as the forerunner of the much dreaded hurricane. With the passage of the hours, however, the violence of the sea manifested a tendency to moderate, which caused the more experienced ones among the crew to arrive at the conclusion that, instead of being the forerunner of a hurricane, the turbulent sea was merely the aftermath of one which had very recently blown itself out.

And this conclusion was abundantly verified on the following day, for about mid-morning a floating object was sighted on the starboard bow which, as the *Nonsuch* drew nearer, proved to be the hull of a small ship, dismasted, floating low in the water, and rolling horribly in the trough of the sea. Then, as now, the sight of a ship in distress always appeals irresistibly to the humanity of the British seaman and no sooner was the character of the floating object identified than the helm of the *Nonsuch* was shifted and she was headed for the wreck. Shortly afterwards the Spanish ensign was hoisted half-way up the ensign staff of the stranger, thus declaring not only her nationality but also that she was in distress, a fact which was sufficiently obvious to all with eyes to see.

When the *Nonsuch* had arrived within about a mile of the heavily labouring craft, George ordered sail to be shortened, and announced to his officers his intention to stand by the wreck until the sea should moderate sufficiently to enable boats to be lowered, when he would take off the crew, and every preparation was made accordingly. The English ship was so manoeuvred as to enable her to pass athwart the stranger's stern and heave-to close under the lee of the latter; and presently, as the space between the two craft rapidly narrowed, George was

enabled to distinguish, painted in large letters, the name *Doña Catalina*. Springing into the weather main rigging of his own ship, the young commander waited until but a few fathoms separated the two vessels, and he was able to clearly distinguish the features of the three men who were clinging desperately to the shattered poop bulwark rail of the wreck, and then, with his hand placed trumpet-wise to his mouth as he stood with his back supported by the rigging, he hailed in Spanish:

“Ho! the *Catalina*, ahoy! Do you wish to be taken off?”

“*Si, Señor, si, si,*” answered a short, stout, black-bearded individual who formed one of the trio on the stranger’s poop, “we are full of water and sinking. Take us off, for the love of God! We have pumped until we can pump no more, our strength being completely exhausted, and the leak is gaining on us rapidly.”

“Very well,” returned George. “I will remain near you until the sea goes down sufficiently to launch a boat. Until then you must do the best you can.”

“But, Señor,” shrieked the black-bearded one, “if you wait until then it will be too late. It will be hours before the sea goes down enough to permit of a boat being launched, and meanwhile our ship is filling fast. Cannot you devise some means of taking us off at once? See how we are rolling, and how the sea is breaking over us! Every moment I am in fear that a heavier sea than usual will strike us and roll our vessel completely over. Holy Mother of God! Do not leave us to drown like rats in a trap, Señor!”

But by this time the two craft had drifted so far apart that further speech just then was impossible, and as George descended from the rigging he gave orders to fill the main topsail and get way on the ship again. Then he ascended to the poop and joined Dyer, who was already there.

“Well, Cap’n, what be us goin’ to do?” demanded the pilot, whose knowledge of Spanish was just sufficient to enable him to gather the drift of what had passed. “Shall us wait a bit longer, and chance the hooker stayin’ right side up till the sea do go down a bit more; or shall us try to launch a boat? I don’t doubt but what, if us watches carefully and works quickly, we can get a boat afloat and unhooked; but us couldn’t get alongside the wrack to take her people off—they’d have to jump overside and trust to us to pick mun up. Then how would us all get out of the boat a’terwards and get mun hoisted up again? But it do surely look to me as though we must do some’at pretty soon, because I don’t believe as that wrack’ll last so very much longer. Look to mun, how her do roll, and look how the sea do breach her! There must be tons o’ water a-pouring down into her hold every minute, and—Lard be merciful—there a goeth. She be turnin’ over now, as I’m a livin’—No, no; ’tis all right; her be rightin’ again, but Cap’n, her can’t live much longer to that rate.”

“No,” agreed George, who, like Dyer, had been breathlessly watching the outrageous antics of the waterlogged craft, and had seen how very nearly she had come to capsizing as the sea flung her up and hove her over on her beam ends—“I’m afraid she cannot. As you say, something must be done if we are to save those poor wretches; but the only thing that I can think of is to at least make the attempt to launch a boat. We will get to windward of the wreck, and then, everything having been previously made ready, we will lower a boat and—if we can get away without being stove—run down to the wreck in the ‘smooth’ of the *Nonsuch’s* lee; get under the lee of the wreck; and her people must jump overboard, two or three at a time, and trust to us to pick them up. I will take command of the boat, and as soon as you see us safely under the lee of the wreck you must fill and keep away, pass to leeward of the wreck, and heave-to as close to her as you can, when we will come round under your lee and get the people aboard one at a time by means of a ‘whip’ from the lee mainyard-arm, trusting to luck for the chance to get the boat aboard again without smashing her to staves. Now try her about, Dyer; I think we ought to be able to fetch well to windward of her now. And I believe the starboard quarter boat will be the easiest to lower and unhook.”

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## Chapter Seven.

### How they came to San Juan de Ulua.

Having explained to Dyer his proposed scheme of operations, George left to the pilot the task of attending to the necessary manoeuvring of the ship, and, going forward, called for four volunteers to go with him in the boat to handle her and assist, if it might be, in saving the unfortunate crew of the Spanish ship. As he had anticipated, he met with no difficulty in obtaining a sufficient number of men for his purpose, four of his old *Bonaventure’s* at once stepping forward at his call. Directing these men to follow him, he then returned aft to where the boat he intended to use hung swinging from the davits and, pointing to her, instructed his volunteers to enter her, remove the plug from her bottom to allow all the water to run out of her, and, while this was doing, pass out the masts, sails, and all other gear not absolutely required in the execution of the task which the intrepid quintette were about to undertake. Then, these things being done, the plug was returned to its place and driven well home, the oars were unlashed, the thole pins shipped, the tackle falls well-greased, the coils cast off the belaying pins, and every preparation made for the delicate operation of launching. While these matters were being attended to the young captain stood looking on, directing the men’s movements, and pondering upon the difficulty which he foresaw in connection with the quick release of the boat from her tackles as soon as she should become water-borne. It was absolutely necessary that this should be infallibly accomplished at precisely the right instant, otherwise there was the risk on the one hand of the boat being smashed to staves by being violently dashed against the side of the heavily rolling ship; or, upon the other, of her being released at one end only, in which case the unreleased end of the boat would be lifted high out of the water again by the counter roll of the ship and her crew all flung into the water.

Suddenly he saw his way clear; the solution of the difficulty had come to him, and he issued his orders rapidly, for time was pressing, the *Nonsuch* had been hove about, and was now bearing down to take up a position just to windward of the wreck. First of all, the boat was temporarily slung by stout ropes from the davit ends; then the

tackles were let go and unhooked. Next, two stout rope strops were passed through the ringbolts by which the boat was suspended from the tackles and one bight passed through the other and secured in place by a well-greased toggle, or piece of wood capable of being easily and quickly withdrawn; and finally the bights thus formed were passed over the hooks of the blocks, the tackles, were boused taut and made fast again, and the temporary supports were cast off, thus leaving the boat once more suspended by the tackles. George explained the device to the men, and when he was satisfied that they perfectly understood the working of it, ordered them into the boat, himself following them and stationing himself at the craft's tiller, when a short wait occurred during which the *Nonsuch* was working her way toward the position necessary for the success of the experiment which was about to be made.

At length the critical moment arrived; the *Nonsuch* rolled and plunged, with creaking timbers and groaning yards, up to windward of and some fifty fathoms distant from the wallowing Spaniard, and, the mainyard having been backed with perfect judgment by Dyer, came to a standstill exactly abreast the dismasted hulk, thus affording a lee and comparatively smooth water in which her boat might make a dash for the wreck; then, taking advantage of a heavy lee roll, the boat was very smartly lowered away upon an even keel, and struck the water with a resounding splash.

"Let go!" yelled George, as he felt the boat take the water, and prompt at the word the two men who were stationed at the tackles drew the well-greased toggles, releasing the boat, oars were thrown out, and away dashed the boat right down to leeward, heading to pass under the stern of the wreck and come up in the comparatively sheltered water under her lee. The passage was but a short one, and some three minutes later the small craft, tossed buoyantly aloft upon the great foaming surges, had safely passed under the stern of the *Doña Catalina* and rounded-to under her lee. Then the *Nonsuch*, which had by this time driven down perilously near to the wreck, filled away again and just managed to handsomely draw clear.

The three Spaniards were still clinging for their lives to the broken bulwarks, and as George looked up he caught a momentary glimpse of some seven or eight other heads peering over the rail down in the vessel's waist; but there was nothing to indicate that anything had been done by those on board to help those who were risking their own lives to save theirs. There was no time for argument or discussion, however; therefore George simply hailed the trio on the poop, tersely explaining that he dared not attempt to lay the boat alongside, and that consequently those who were anxious to have a chance for life must simply jump overboard and trust to those in the boat to pick them up. And at the same time he directed the two bow oarsmen to lay in their oars and hold themselves ready to pick up those who cared to jump while the other two oarsmen paddled the boat up as close to the heaving and staggering wreck as it was prudent to go.

Then ensued a long and heated debate among the Spaniards themselves, not one of whom seemed to possess the courage necessary to trust himself even momentarily to the raging sea, during which the crew of the boat patiently maintained their position within a fathom or so of the wallowing hulk; but at length some sort of a decision seemed to have been arrived at, for the short, stout, black-bearded man suddenly made his appearance at the gangway, grasping a handspike, and, having first inquired whether those in the boat were ready, and receiving an affirmative reply, sprang outward, feet foremost. He struck the water within less than half a fathom of the boat, vanished beneath the surface for a moment, and re-appeared, coughing and spitting, still convulsively clutching the handspike, close enough to enable those in the boat to instantly seize him by the collar and haul him in over the gunwale, none the worse for his plunge and dip. He was at once hustled aft into the stern sheets, out of the way, and his rescue had been effected with such absolute promptitude and simplicity that there was now no further hesitation on the part of those left behind, who, one after another, presented themselves at the gangway, some provided with handspikes, some with oars, and one or two with short lengths of planking, or a grating, and leaped, with the courage of desperation, into the swirling foam, to the number of just a dozen. Then, as no more appeared, George inquired where the remainder were; upon which the black-bearded man, after counting heads, informed him that all the living had now left the ship, the rest of the crew having been either killed or washed overboard when the ship became dismasted.

And now came the most difficult part of the whole undertaking, namely, getting the boat and its cargo safe aboard the parent ship. The *Nonsuch* was just then about a mile distant from the derelict, hove-to on the larboard tack, awaiting a signal from George indicating that the rescue had been effected and that he was now ready to make the great attempt. That signal was now made by lashing a handkerchief to the end of a boathook and waving it wildly in the air; upon seeing which, Dyer, who had been manoeuvring the ship with the most consummate judgment, filled upon her and brought her close up under the derelict's lee. Then, and not until then, George gave the word, and the now heavily loaded boat, floating deep in the water, headed out from under the sheltering lee of the derelict, made a dash across the short space of turbulent surges that separated her from the *Nonsuch*, accomplished the passage safely, slipped round under the stern of the ship, now once more hove-to on the larboard tack, and rounded-to in the comparative "smooth" of her lee.

But now that she was there, how were the people to be got out of her? For it was just as dangerous to attempt to lay her alongside the *Nonsuch* as it had been to make the same attempt with the *Doña Catalina*. But Dyer had seen to this; for while the boat had been absent on her errand of mercy the pilot had ordered a block to be lashed to the starboard mainyard-arm, a whip rove through it, a boatswain's chair made fast to the end of the whip, and a hauling line bent on to the boatswain's chair; and when the boat ranged up under the *Nonsuch's* lee, there was the whole apparatus dangling in the air, ready to effect the transfer. To manoeuvre the boat under it and to lower the chair into the boat was an easy matter, when all that remained was for a man to get into the contrivance and be hoisted aloft and hauled into safety. The transfer of the twelve rescued Spaniards was safely accomplished in considerably less than an hour; and now all that remained was to hook on the boat and hoist her up to the davits. Yes; that was all; but it was the most difficult and delicate part of the whole undertaking; yet the seamanship of George and Dyer proved equal to the task, and another quarter of an hour saw the boat once more safely dangling at the davits, with scarcely a scratch on her paint to show what a trying ordeal she had passed through, and the *Nonsuch* was again speeding away to the westward, leaving the derelict to her not long delayed fate.

The quarter boat safely hoisted, George at once turned his attention to his guests. The black-bearded man, it

appeared, was the captain of the ill-fated *Doña Catalina*, and he introduced himself as simply Captain Robledo Martinez, without the pretentious prefix of "Don" or anything else. Him, George took under his own wing, ordering a cot to be slung for him down on the half-deck, with a screen of canvas triced up round it to insure privacy. The poor fellow, like all the rest of the rescued Spaniards, had, of course, only the clothes that he stood up in, and they were dripping wet; but, fortunately, the *Nonsuch* was well provided in the matter of slop chests, and Captain Martinez, together with the other survivors of the *Doña Catalina*, was soon rigged afresh.

It transpired that the Spanish vessel was on her way from Cartagena to San Juan de Ulua, with despatches to the Viceroy of Mexico, when she encountered the hurricane that had overwhelmed her, and that, before being rescued, her crew had been exposed to the full fury of the elements for twenty-six hours, in momentary expectation that the vessel would founder under their feet; they were therefore given a warm meal, and then dispatched below to make up their arrears of rest and recover from the exhaustion induced by prolonged exposure.

But the conjunction of the names Cartagena and San Juan de Ulua, casually mentioned by Martinez in his brief conversation with George before retiring below, set the young Englishman thinking hard. The conjunction was suggestive, to say the least of it; for Cartagena was the city from which the plate fleet convoy started upon its annual long ocean voyage to Spain, accompanied by the Cartagena contingent of plate ships, with which it proceeded to Nombre de Dios—regarded as "The Treasure-House of the World"—to take charge of the ships which proceeded thence annually, loaded with treasure of incalculable value for the replenishment of the Spanish coffers; while from thence the combined fleet was wont to proceed to San Juan, there to be joined by the ships carrying the Mexican contribution of treasure, of scarcely less value than that shipped from Nombre. George Saint Leger had not been for so many months intimately associated with Dyer, the pilot of the expedition, and a survivor of the disaster which had overtaken Admiral John Hawkins at San Juan de Ulua only a year previously, without hearing all about the twelve large treasure galleons which the Devonians had found lying defenceless in the harbour of that city when they arrived there, torn and shattered by such a hurricane as that which had reduced the *Doña Catalina* to a waterlogged and sinking hulk, and he wondered whether perchance it might be his good fortune to find another such fleet in the harbour upon his arrival there. If so—well, Admiral Hawkins had spared the treasure which he found there, for the best of all reasons, namely, that his own ships were in no condition to engage in a fight with the shore batteries, which it would be necessary to silence before he could seize the plate ships, while, on the other hand, it was imperative that he should enter the harbour to refit, and he could not do so without the consent of the Spanish authorities; therefore he had been obliged to sign a convention whereby in consideration of his receiving permission to refit in peace and without hindrance, he was to leave the plate ships unmolested. Hawkins had scrupulously adhered to his part of the agreement, but the Spaniards had deliberately broken theirs; and George was determined that now they should dearly pay for their treachery, if Dame Fortune would but favour him. He talked the matter over, first with Dyer, and then they together discussed it with Basset, the captain of the soldiers, and Heard, the purser; with the result that it was unanimously agreed among them that they would make a determined attempt upon the fleet, if it should happen to be in harbour upon their arrival.

But, in order to insure the success of their daring project, it was necessary that they should be possessed of the fullest information possible; therefore when Martinez came on deck that evening, after several hours of refreshing sleep, George informed the unfortunate man, in a perfectly friendly way, that he and the survivors of his crew were prisoners; and demanded to know what had become of the despatches with which he had been entrusted. Martinez, who proved to be quite a simple straightforward sailor, at once replied that he had them in his pocket; and upon Saint Leger demanding them he handed them over with merely a formal protest; whereupon George found himself possessed of a small packet carefully enveloped in several folds of oiled silk in which the honest skipper had wrapped them prior to jumping overboard, when escaping from his wrecked ship.

Of course George opened the despatches forthwith, to find that they consisted, for the most part, of documents which possessed no interest at all for him; but there was one letter which furnished him with precisely the information that it was most important for him to possess. It was from the Governor of the city of Cartagena, and was addressed to "His Excellency Don Martin Enriquez, Viceroy of his Most Catholic Majesty's Province of Mexico, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera," and was to the effect that, news having reached the writer from Lima that an epidemic of sickness had broken out among a large body of soldiers due to return home with that year's plate fleet, the sailing of the Lima contingent had been postponed, to allow time for the epidemic to exhaust itself; and that therefore the departure of the convoy from Cartagena had likewise been postponed. The object of this letter, the writer went on to say, was to acquaint His Excellency with the fact of, and reason for, the delay, that he might not be rendered unduly anxious, through the non-arrival of the convoy; and to request that on no account should the plate ships be allowed to proceed to sea until the arrival of the convoy under the protection of which they were to make the homeward voyage. Which meant, as George pointed out to his officers when he translated the document to them, that upon their arrival at San Juan de Ulua, they would assuredly find a certain number of plate ships in the harbour, laden with treasure, and quite defenceless, save for such protection as the shore batteries might be able to afford. It was the chance of a lifetime, *if* they could but render those shore batteries innocuous; and an informal council of war was at once held in the great state cabin of the *Nonsuch* to decide how this most desirable end might be achieved.

To start with, Dyer, who was the only man among them who had ever been in the harbour of San Juan de Ulua, was furnished with pencil and paper, and commanded to draw a chart of the place, to scale, as nearly as he could, from memory; and after half an hour's arduous labour—for chart drawing was not one of Dyer's strong points—he produced a sketch that, rough as it was, promised to be of the utmost value to the adventurers. For it showed how, owing to the conformation of the land, Hawkins, with his small squadron, had, a year ago, been able to keep the whole of the Spanish fleet from entering the harbour until he had concluded an agreement with the treacherous Viceroy to permit them to do so; and how a small, well-found fleet outside might, if not driven off by bad weather, effectually blockade the port and prevent the escape of all shipping from it. Further than that, it disclosed to the more acute perceptions of George and Basset, the fact, which Dyer's denser intellect had failed to grasp, that the much dreaded batteries had been mainly constructed, not so much to defend the place from an attack by sea, but to render a land attack by Indians practically impossible. For if the chart were correctly drawn—and Dyer was very

straitly questioned upon this particular point—it showed that there was a certain spot in the harbour where, if a ship were moored, she would be sheltered from the fire of both batteries while at the same time the entire town, which, after all, was but a very small place, would be fully exposed to the artillery fire of the ship. Once completely satisfied upon this point, Saint Leger and Basset believed they saw their way to the capture and subjugation of the town, and laid their plans accordingly.

Three days later, shortly after noon, they made the land and, as soon as Dyer had verified his bearings, hove-to for the night, some ten miles off-shore and well out of sight of the town, the day being by then too far advanced to permit of decisive action. But with the first appearance of dawn on the following day, sail was made, and the *Nonsuch* stood boldly into San Juan de Ulua harbour and came to an anchor in the spot previously determined upon, where, as Dyer's chart had indicated, she was safe from the fire of the two batteries which had been constructed to defend the northern and southern extremities of the town, which were its most vulnerable points, from a land attack. Twelve large plate ships were riding at anchor in the harbour, of which ten appeared to be fully loaded, while cargo was being actively transferred from the shore to the other two when the English ship ran in and anchored between them and the shore.

The appearance of the *Nonsuch* in the harbour was immediately productive of something very nearly approaching to panic, both in the town and on board the plate ships; for she had entered with the cross of Saint George flaunting from her ensign staff, and the first impression of the Spaniards was that their dreaded enemy, Drake, had returned; the bells of the cathedral clanged out a wild alarm; and it was seen that the crews of some of the plate ships were making hasty preparations to get under way, with the evident object of attempting to escape to the open sea. This last, of course, had to be at once put a stop to; therefore the moment that the anchor was down, George caused a boat to be lowered, and, with its crew armed to the teeth, pulled round the Spanish fleet, hailing each ship belonging to it, and informing the captains that any ship seen to be getting under way would at once be fired into and sunk. This threat, backed up as it was by the display of the English ship's ordnance, had the desired effect, and there were no further attempts at flight just then on the part of the plate ships.

George's next act was to send Captain Martinez, of the wrecked *Doña Catalina*, ashore in one of the *Nonsuch's* boats, under a flag of truce. The captain was handed his dispatches, and was instructed to either deliver or forward them to the persons to whom they were addressed; and he was also given a letter addressed to the governor or chief magistrate of the town, summoning that functionary, together with twelve of the most influential inhabitants of the place, to a conference on board the English ship, upon a matter of vital import; the conference to begin not later than noon that day; the penalty of non-attendance being the bombardment of the town. Then, every preparation having been made to carry into effect the threatened bombardment, the English sat down and patiently awaited developments.

Half an hour before the expiration of the specified time a large boat, flying a flag of truce, was seen to leave the wharf, and some ten minutes later she came up to within a few fathoms of the *Nonsuch* gangway, when it was seen that, in addition to eight oarsmen, she carried in her stern sheets thirteen men, most of whom had passed beyond middle age, while all were, in appearance at least, and so far as dress was concerned, men of position and substance.

Arrived within easy hailing distance, the oarsmen ceased their efforts at a sign from the man at the tiller, and an elderly individual, attired in what might be supposed to be robes of office, rose to his feet and, doffing his plumed hat, bowed to the little group of officers mustered on the ship's poop. Then, hat in hand, he remarked:

"Noble señores, I am Juan Alvarez, the alcalde of San Juan de Ulua, very much at your service; and in response to your somewhat imperatively worded letter I and my fellow townsmen have come out to confer with you. But before we board your ship I should like to ask you just one question. I see by your flag that you are English. Come you in peace, or in war, señores?"

"That," answered George, stepping forward, "is for you and your fellow townsmen to decide. But meanwhile I give you the assurance of an Englishman who has never yet broken his word to friend or foe, that you may come aboard without fear, and that when our conference is at an end you shall all be permitted to return to the shore without molestation—unless it becomes apparent that hostages are necessary."

The old gentleman bowed and, still with his hat in his hand, ventured upon a further inquiry. "And pray, noble señor, who is to determine whether or not hostages are regarded as necessary?" he demanded.

"I and my officers will determine that point," answered George. "But," he continued, "I give you the further assurance that, should we decide upon the necessity to retain any of you as hostages, their persons will be as safe, and they will be treated with as much honour, on board this ship, as in their own houses—unless treachery of any kind be attempted, in which case I will hang them at my yard-arms as a wholesome warning to others."

This statement caused the utmost perturbation to the alcalde and his companions, as might easily be seen, for they all at once started to their feet and burst into excited conversation. But, as is usual in such cases, there were two or three—of whom the alcalde was one—who soon obtained an ascendancy over the rest, quieting them and themselves carrying on the discussion; and after some ten minutes of earnest debate the rest sat down, leaving the alcalde standing alone to propound a still further question.

"Illustrious señor," he said, addressing himself to George, "my companions and I feel that, before we proceed further, or place ourselves altogether in your power, it is very necessary that we should know what acts you would be likely to construe as treachery on our part."

"The reply to such a question is not difficult," replied George. "We should regard as an act of treachery any attempt on the part of either of those ships to put to sea; and also any attempt to attack us at disadvantage and without due warning, such as was perpetrated last year, in this very harbour, on my countryman, Admiral Hawkins."



This answer was received with much shaking of heads and uplifting of hands, followed by further eager consultation and debate, which ended at last by the alcalde putting a further and final question:

“And, in the event of our refusing to board your ship under such conditions, señor, what will happen?”

“You will be permitted to return to the shore without molestation,” answered George. “But,” he continued, “as soon as you shall have arrived and are landed, I shall seize every ship in this harbour; and, that done, shall proceed to bombard your town until you see fit to surrender it to me unconditionally!”

More perturbation, more shaking of heads and agitated waving of hands, followed by further excited discussion lasting for close upon a quarter of an hour, after which the alcalde, standing in the midst of his companions and again addressing himself to George, observed:

“Most illustrious señor, we, the alcalde and twelve of the representatives of the inhabitants of the city of San Juan de Ulua, have decided to rely upon your assurances, and now declare ourselves ready to board your ship, there to listen with all deference and attention to such communication as you may desire to make to us.” And therewith the old gentleman, bowing with much dignity, seated himself, replaced his hat, and gave an order to the steersman of the boat, who repeated it to the oarsmen; whereupon the boat got under way and pulled up alongside to where the gangway ladder already hung over the side for the accommodation of the Committee. And while this was doing, George, followed by his little knot of officers, descended from the poop to the main deck and grouped themselves about the gangway in readiness to receive their by no means willing visitors.

Don Juan Alvarez, the alcalde of San Juan de Ulua, was the first to ascend the side and pass through the *Nonsuch's* gangway, when, again removing his hat and bowing profoundly to the little group of Englishmen, he stood aside until his twelve companions had joined him, when he proceeded to ceremoniously introduce them, one after the other, until he had named them all. Then George followed suit in like fashion, first introducing himself and then each of his officers to the group of visitors.

This ceremony duly performed, the alcalde once more took up the tale.

“Most illustrious señors,” he said, bowing to the Englishmen collectively, “touching the exceedingly delicate matter of treachery, you have the assurance of myself and colleagues that, so far as the city is concerned, you may absolutely depend that nothing of an overt nature shall be permitted to occur until an understanding of some sort—an amicable one, we all trust—shall have been arrived at between us. But with regard to the ships in the harbour, we feel that we cannot undertake to be answerable for the conduct of their captains and crews, since we have had no opportunity to communicate with them; we therefore venture to suggest that, in order to avoid anything in the nature of an untoward event, I, as chief magistrate, be permitted to write and dispatch to each ship an order embodying the instructions contained in the communication received by me, through your courtesy, this morning, from the governor of Cartagena.”

“Or, perhaps, what would be still better,” replied George, “I would advise that you write an open order to the captain and chief officer of each ship, commanding their immediate presence here. I will then place them in honourable confinement until our negotiations are concluded, when we will, of course, release them. By adopting such a course I think we may make quite sure that none of them, through mistaken zeal, will do anything to interrupt the smooth course of our rather delicate negotiations. What say you?”

The idea at once strongly commended itself to the party, who, it was quite evident, were more deeply interested in the preservation of their own skins than in anything else, and who, it was equally evident, were mortally afraid that some over-zealous individual might be tempted to do something for which this stern-faced young Englishman would hold them accountable; accordingly the order was written in the cabin of the *Nonsuch*, summoning the commanding officers and their immediate subordinates to at once assemble on board the English ship to assist in the arrangement of a matter of vital importance to themselves and the city; and when it had been submitted to and approved by George and his officers, the alcalde's boat was despatched with instructions to go the round of the plate ship fleet, show the order, and bring the officers back upon her return. That done, refreshments—including a liberal service of wine taken out of the *Santa Maria*—were placed upon the table in the state cabin, and the alcalde and his companions were invited to partake thereof pending the arrival of the men from the ships; but they were much too anxious to do justice to the viands spread before them, and would fain have forthwith proceeded to the business which they had been summoned to discuss. But George refused to say a word until the officers of the plate ships were safe under hatches; and a long interval now elapsed during which the anxiety and apprehension of the alcalde and his associates visibly increased, which was precisely the effect that the astute young captain desired to produce. At length, however, certain sounds from the deck outside reached the ears of those in the cabin, announcing the arrival of the men from the fleet, while other sounds, especially those of Spanish voices raised high in angry protest, proclaimed, a little later, that the new arrivals were being conducted below somewhat against their will; and finally Dyer appeared in the doorway with the information that the Spanish sailors had been taken below and were safe under guard; whereupon George rose to his feet and, addressing his visitors in his best Spanish, said:

“Now, señors, every precaution that we could think of has been taken to insure the undisturbed discussion of the business which has brought me and my compatriots to San Juan de Ulua; with your permission, therefore, we will proceed.”

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## Chapter Eight.

### How George proceeded to deal with the Authorities of San Juan.

An uneasy stir among his audience followed this brief introduction, showing clearly the highly-wrought condition of

the Spaniards' nerves as they leaned forward in their seats and fixed their eyes intently upon the speaker's face. To still further increase the tension betrayed in the faces and attitudes of his audience, George paused impressively for a few seconds, and then resumed:

"A year ago," said he, "seven ships, storm torn and shattered, put into this harbour in order to refit. They were manned by Englishmen, fellow-countrymen of my own and those with me. They had been engaged in lawful and peaceful trade with various ports along the Main, and entered this harbour with the utmost confidence, secure in the conviction that, having committed no offence, they might implicitly rely upon Spanish honour. When they arrived, they found twelve defenceless plate ships, laden with gold and silver, in the harbour; and had they been so disposed my countrymen could have seized those ships, or as many of them as they chose to take, and sailed away in them, leaving their own damaged craft behind them; and nobody could have said them nay. But my countrymen were traders, not pirates; and great though the temptation must have been, they left those galleons alone, asking only the hospitality of your harbour and permission to refit their ships without molestation. Also when, upon the day after the arrival of the English ships, the remainder of your plate fleet and its convoy appeared off this port, my countrymen could have kept them outside, had they so chosen, with the result that every ship would have been lost in the next gale that might arise. *You* knew, as well as did my own countrymen, the tremendous risk and peril to which those enormously rich ships would have been exposed, had they been prevented from entering the harbour; and you hastened to arrange a convention with the English whereby your own ships were to be permitted to enter the port, while the English were to be allowed to refit their vessels without hindrance or molestation. Is all this true, señors, or have I misstated any part of the story, so far?"

George paused for a reply; but for a full minute or more there was no response. Then at last the alcalde slowly rose to his feet and stretching forth his right hand deprecatingly toward the young captain, said:

"Most illustrious señor, all that you have said is absolutely true. But before—"

"Pardon, señor," interrupted George. "I have not yet finished. When I have done so I shall be quite prepared to listen courteously and with patience to whatever you may be pleased to say.

"In accordance with the terms of that convention the English were permitted to work for three days at the dismantling of their ships in preparation for the work of refitting—and then, señors, without a word or hint of warning, at the very instant when they were least able to defend themselves, you treacherously fell upon them; with the result that more than three hundred Englishmen were slain, four of their ships were either captured or destroyed, many Englishmen were taken prisoners, and the residue were driven to sea in their least dismantled ships, short of food and water, to sink or swim as the fates might decide. One of the ships which effected her escape afterward sank, and with her went the entire proceeds of the voyage, while the other two, riddled and torn by Spanish shot, treacherously fired, only reached England after a voyage of incredible difficulty, toil, and suffering. Now, señors, the object of my visit to San Juan de Ulua is to avenge that treacherous attack upon my fellow-countrymen, to exact ample compensation therefor and for all the loss and suffering attendant upon it, and to demand the release of those who fell into your hands upon that occasion. If you have aught to urge by way of excuse for, or justification of, your treachery, I am willing to hear it and give it my most careful consideration."

Again silence, tense and electric, prevailed in the cabin at the conclusion of the young English captain's indictment, the alcalde and his companions staring helplessly at one another as each groped for something, some sign or suggestion, upon which to frame a reply to the charges which they knew only too well to be true. At length one of the party, seemingly unable to any longer endure the tension, rose slowly to his feet and, addressing George, said:

"Señor Capitano, it is not possible for us to deny the truth of the charges which you have brought against us; to our shame and sorrow we are obliged to admit that all you have said is only too true. Yet, señor, in self-defence, I submit that, individually, none of us who are here assembled is to blame for the occurrence to which you have referred, and therefore I contend that you cannot, in justice, hold us, or any one of us, responsible for it. We, who now sit here in the cabin of your ship, were all present in San Juan de Ulua when the attack upon your countrymen took place, and I am confident that I am expressing the opinion of my fellow-citizens as well as of myself in saying that we one and all deplored and were ashamed of it, and would have prevented it, had it been possible. But, señor, the citizens of San Juan had no voice in the matter; we were not consulted; we were not even informed of what was about to happen; the whole affair was the conception of his Excellency the Viceroy, and the attack was organised and carried out at his instigation and order by the military and naval forces under his command; the citizens took no part in it, so far as I am aware; or, if any of them did so, it was only the comparatively few lawless ones who are to be found in every community. Therefore, señor, I contend that your quarrel, which I admit to be just, is not with the peaceful and law-abiding citizens of San Juan, but with his Excellency the Viceroy, who ordered the attack, and the military and naval officials who carried it out."

A low murmur of approval and agreement ran round the assembly as the speaker resumed his seat, and then there ensued a pause while George waited to see whether anyone else had anything to say. Presently, in response to the glance of inquiry with which he regarded the various members of the assemblage, first one and then another arose and briefly remarked that he fully concurred in what his compatriot had so well said, until nearly, if not quite, all had expressed approval.

"Very well, señors," responded George, when at length he found that no one had anything to add, "I am willing to accept your collective assurance that the citizens of San Juan as a whole are guiltless of all participation in, or approval of, the treacherous and unjustifiable attack upon my countrymen of which I complain; therefore it follows that the local representatives of the Spanish Government are the responsible parties, and it is with them that I must settle the account. As I have already informed you, I am here to demand the fullest and most ample reparation for the outrage of which I complain, and for all loss and damage attendant upon it; and I ask you, do you think it in the least degree probable that the Viceroy will peaceably concede my demands? If he will not, I shall exact them by force of arms; and in that case I warn you all that it will be very difficult, if not indeed impossible, for me to discriminate

between public and private property; it will therefore be for you, señor"—bowing to the alcalde—"to use your best efforts to induce the Viceroy and those under him to arrange an amicable settlement with me; for otherwise it may be necessary for me to, among other measures, bombard your town!"

"Nay, nay, señor; not that, not that, I pray you!" exclaimed the alcalde, starting to his feet in great agitation. "Think, most Illustrious, think of the many innocent lives, of the women and children, who must inevitably perish if you resort to such a bar—such a—an—extreme measure as that which you threaten."

"I do think of it, señor alcalde," answered George; "but I think also of my fellow-countrymen who died here as a consequence of Spanish treachery, and also of those others who are at this moment lying captive and pining in your dungeons; and the latter thoughts render me inflexible. I will not fire a single shot at your town if I can help it; and it must be your task, señor, to so conduct matters and represent them to the Viceroy, that it shall be unnecessary for me to resort to such an extreme measure."

"I will gladly do my utmost, most noble señor, to carry out such instructions as you may be pleased to give me," answered the alcalde.

"That is well," said George. "I want you to convey to the Viceroy—by the way, where is the Viceroy? Are you here as his representative?"

"Nay, not so, señor," answered the alcalde. "His Excellency is at present in the city of Mexico. The Commandant of the military lies in his house, sick of a fever and quite unable to transact business; and that is why I am here."

"Um!" commented George. "That makes it rather awkward—for you, I am afraid, señor." He considered a little, and then asked: "How long would it take a well-mounted messenger to proceed to the city of Mexico with a message, and return with an answer?"

"Six days at the very least, señor; the roads are very bad," was the reply.

"Then that rules the Viceroy out of the question," said George, "for I cannot spare the time to send messages backward and forward a six days' journey. Now, as to the military Commandant: you say that he is too ill to transact business. Is there not a sub-commandant, or some such official, with whom I can deal?"

"There is, of course, the Captain of Soldiers, señor," answered the alcalde. "But I come next in rank to the Commandant."

"Then," said George, "it is clear that you, señor, are the official with whom I must deal; and if you are unwilling to bear the entire responsibility, you must e'en share it with the military captain. Now, these are my demands, which I will presently embody in a written document, in order that you may have something to show when the time comes for you to reckon with the Viceroy.

"First: I claim one million *pezos* of gold to cover the loss of ships and treasure resulting to my countrymen through the Viceroy's treacherous attack upon them. Stay a moment, señor, that is only the beginning of my demands,"—as the alcalde half rose to his feet, protestingly.

"Secondly: I will put down the number of Englishmen slain on that occasion at, let us say, three hundred and fifty. For the benefit of those who were dependent upon those men I demand one thousand gold *pezos* each, or three hundred and fifty thousand in all.

"Thirdly: I demand the release of every Englishman now in your hands, with certain provisos concerning them, which I will make known when they have been delivered into my hands.

"And lastly: I will retain these twelve gentlemen, your companions, as hostages on board my ship, to guard against any further treachery; the understanding being that upon the first sign of anything of the kind, I hang them, one after the other, at my yard

As one man the unhappy thirteen sprang to their feet, and for a few minutes the cabin was vociferous with their protests. Saint Leger stood listening with perfect calmness to the storm as it raged around him, and his absolute imperturbability seemed at length to have a tranquillising effect upon his unwilling guests, for, finally, realising that what they said produced not the slightest visible effect upon him, they resumed their seats one after another, and eventually peace was restored, the party waiting eagerly to hear what reply might be forthcoming. Then George once more spoke.

"I think, señores," he said, "that you are alarming yourselves quite unnecessarily—unless indeed you feel that you are unable to rely upon the good faith of your fellow-countrymen. For your safety depends entirely upon that. So long as they can be content to deal straightforwardly with me, no harm shall happen to you; it is only in the event of treachery that you will have anything to fear, and surely you can trust to your friend the alcalde to take all the steps needful to prevent anything of that kind."

"I will do my very utmost in that direction," interposed the alcalde. "It is only the injudicious activity of the soldiery that we really need fear; and I think it will be well, Señor Capitano, for you to permit my colleagues here to prepare a joint letter setting forth the fact of their detention by you as hostages for the good behaviour of all, and the unhappy consequences which must result to them from ill-advised action on the part of any one; so that I may have documentary evidence to exhibit in confirmation of my own statement, if I find such confirmation needful. As to your demands, señor, it will, of course, be impossible for me to concede any of them upon my own unsupported authority; in the absence of his Excellency, the Viceroy, and in view of your refusal to afford time for communication with him, I must discuss the situation with such of the authorities as are immediately accessible, and abide by their decision,

whatever it may be. There is one matter, however, to which I may as well refer at once, since it will have to be dealt with sooner or later, and that is, the release of the prisoners taken upon the occasion of the ill-advised attack upon your countrymen last year. I approach the subject with the utmost reluctance, for I fear that what I have to say will be very ill received by you. I must say it, however; and it is this: it will be quite impossible for us to comply with that condition in its entirety, for the best of all reasons, namely, that only a very small number of them still remain in our hands."

"What, then, has become of the others?" demanded George, in a low, tense voice, the significance of which caused a visible shudder to thrill through his audience.

"I very deeply regret to say, most illustrious señor—and I beg you at the outset to understand that no one here is in the very remotest degree responsible for the deplorable fact which I have to state—that some of them are—dead, while others have been condemned to the galleys and are—I greatly fear—completely lost sight of by this time," replied the alcalde, in great trepidation, which was fully shared by his twelve companions.

For a few moments that seemed ages to the quaking Spaniards sitting there, George remained silent, his burning gaze searching face after face questioningly, and more than one present, knowing the nature of the revelation that must now very soon come, seemed to already feel a rope tightening about his neck.

At length, when the silence had become almost intolerable, George spoke again, still with ominous calmness and quietness. Leaning forward across the table, with his eyes steadfastly fixed upon those of the alcalde, he said:

"Your reply, señor, sounds curiously significant, and impels me to demand further information. Can you, by any chance, inform me how many of those men are dead, what were their names, and what was the cause and nature of their death?"

"No, señor, I cannot answer your question categorically at the present moment," replied the alcalde. "All that I can tell you, now, is that some of them died of the wounds which they received in the fight, some died of disease, and the rest—perished—in the—Inquisition—or linger still within its walls. But records, of course, exist from which it will no doubt be possible to furnish you with all details."

"So," commented George, after another terrible silence, "some perished in the Inquisition—or linger still within its walls. Can you tell me, señor, how they chanced to get into the power of the Inquisition?"

"Certainly, señor," answered the alcalde, with alacrity, believing that he saw his way to clear himself and his colleagues from blame. "Upon their capture, they were naturally at first confined in prison by order of the military authorities. From thence some of them—a few—were sent to the galleys, some—as I just now had the honour to mention to you, died in prison of their wounds, and the remainder were claimed by the Chief Inquisitor."

"I see," commented George. "Yes, I think I begin to understand, and see my way. Now, señor, I will furnish you with pens and paper, and you can proceed to draft the document to which you just now referred, while I place on record the nature and extent of my claims. When we have done that, I will go ashore with you, taking with me a party of armed men, accompanied by whom I purpose to call at your Inquisition and remove from thence any Englishmen whom I may find within its walls. I have decided to take this step, not only to save time, but also because, having seen something of your fellow-countrymen in Old Spain, I know the extreme reluctance with which you would regard any suggestion of mine that you should bring pressure of any kind to bear upon your own clergy, therefore I will relieve you of all embarrassment on that score by personally assuming the responsibility. It will also probably be necessary that I should have an interview with the commander of your military forces, as I presume that he is the official who will be able to furnish me with the names of the Englishmen captured, with particulars of the manner in which they were disposed of. Indeed, upon second thoughts, I am inclined to believe that he is the man upon whom I ought first to call; and since I presume that it will be necessary for you also to call upon him—in the interests of your friends here—we will make the call together."

So saying George produced writing materials, and, handing a liberal supply to the alcalde, seated himself at the table and proceeded to enumerate in writing the several demands which he had already made by word of mouth, quite undisturbed by the excited discussion which was proceeding among the Spaniards as to the precise terms in which their own document should be worded so as to render it as impressive as possible to those to whom it might be necessary to exhibit it. His own work was soon done, and a copy taken for retention and reference, if needful; and then he sat patiently for nearly half-an-hour until the hostages' letter had been drafted to their satisfaction, and duly signed. Next, having formally handed his written demand to the alcalde, he invited the latter to follow him out on deck, where, summoning Basset, the captain of the soldiers, and Dyer, the pilot, he issued to them certain instructions. Then, turning to the alcalde, who had stood by, listening, but understanding nothing of what was being said, George remarked:

"Señor Alvarez, as you have just seen, I have issued certain instructions to two of my officers, and they are these. Don Ricardo Basset, my military commandant, I have instructed to muster ten of his soldiers, fully armed and equipped, to accompany me ashore, under him, as a body guard. And to Don Roberto Dyer, my lieutenant, I have given instructions that the gentlemen whom I have considered it necessary to retain as hostages are to be treated with the utmost possible courtesy, so long as all matters go well, but that upon the slightest sign or indication of treachery upon the part of your countrymen, either ashore or afloat, he is to hang them, one after the other, at those yard-arms, up there. Also, he is to keep his guns trained upon the town and, in the event of none of the landing party returning before sunset, open fire upon it forthwith. I have explained these matters to you in order that you may realise that upon you, and upon the success with which you are able to impress upon your compatriots the absolute necessity for complete submission, depends the lives of the hostages whom you are leaving behind you. Ah! here comes Señor Basset with his guard; and I see that the boat is also ready; therefore, as there may be much to be done between this and sunset, we will go as soon as you are ready, señor."

Whereupon Don Juan Alvarez, the alcalde of San Juan de Ulua, hurried back to the great state cabin to reassure and bid farewell to the hostages, and then, returning to the deck, accompanied George to the boat, where Basset and his men had already taken their places; and the party pushed off and headed for the landing place.

Although it was a city, San Juan was, at this period of its history, but a very small place, of little more than a square mile in area, with only two streets at all worthy of the name, these two streets traversing each other at right angles and crossing in the centre of the city, the junction of the two being at the Grand Plaza, or Square, one side of which was occupied by the Cathedral, while the other three sides were given up to the Government and Municipal Buildings. It was to one of these last, a large and imposing building with the arms of Spain boldly sculptured upon its pediment, that the alcalde conducted the little party of Englishmen, and which he entered alone, after apologising elaborately for doing so, upon the plea that it would greatly facilitate matters if he were permitted to first see Don Manuel Reberia, the acting Commandant, and explain to him the situation. George agreed with him that this might be so, and patiently took up his stand outside, waiting, in company with Basset and his squad of soldiers, in the shadow of the building until he should be summoned to enter. And meanwhile the party became objects of curiosity and by no means friendly comment to a rapidly increasing crowd, chiefly of men of the labouring class, who came to gaze curiously upon the little knot of resolute-looking Englishmen who returned their gaze so fearlessly, blowing their lighted matches occasionally and handling their muskets in significant fashion when the mob showed signs of becoming rather too demonstrative.

At length, after an absence of nearly twenty minutes, the alcalde re-appeared and, with further apologies, this time for his prolonged absence, invited George to accompany him into the building for the purpose of being presented to Don Manuel Reberia, the acting Commandant. This gentleman was found installed in a room which partook, in about equal proportions, of the characteristics of an office and a barrack-room, with a sentry outside the door, who stolidly saluted the pair as they passed in.

Captain Reberia proved to be a typical Spanish soldier of the period, bluff and hearty, but exceedingly courteous in manner, with, according to his own account, a profound respect and admiration for the English, so far as his knowledge of them extended, yet George quickly came to the conclusion that the good man was suffering from a certain feeling of soreness at the idea of the city, for the safety of which he was responsible, being to all intents and purposes in the power and at the mercy of the exceedingly young man to whom he was introduced. He greeted George courteously, yet with a certain suggestion of restrained antagonism, and then said:

“Señor, my friend, Don Juan Alvarez, has very briefly acquainted me with the extraordinary circumstances of your visit to our port, and of the still more extraordinary demands which you have seen fit to make. Now, I may as well mention that, so far as those demands are concerned, it will be quite impossible for me to concede them without first consulting—”

“Pardon me, Don Manuel,” interrupted George, who was already beginning to suspect a disposition on the part of this individual at least to set up a system of delay and retardation of proceedings, “I do not think we need enter upon a discussion of my demands as a whole just now. The object of my visit to you is to obtain a list of the names of the Englishmen who fell into your hands last year as a result of your unprovoked attack upon the squadron of my countryman, Admiral Hawkins, and a statement of what has become of them. I presume you can furnish me with this information, can you not?”

“No doubt—yes, no doubt I can,” replied Don Manuel, with deliberation. “A search of the records should certainly enable us to discover the information which you require; but of course it will take time. Still, I think I may promise you that in a week from now—”

“A week!” exploded George, “A *week!*” Then he turned to the alcalde, and, calming himself with an effort, said: “Señor, I am afraid that your friend Don Manuel, here, does not realise the urgency of this matter, or the extreme seriousness of the situation. I want the information asked for, *now, at once*, within the hour at least. Will you have the very great goodness to make this clear to him?”

Whereupon the alcalde drew Don Manuel away into a far corner of the room and, with every evidence of extreme agitation, addressed himself earnestly to the soldier for some five minutes or more, at the end of which the pair returned to where George was standing by the table, fidgeting with his sword-hilt. The arguments and remonstrances of the alcalde seemed to have been effective, for upon their return Don Manuel said:

“I crave your pardon, most noble señor; I certainly did not understand that the matter was anything like so urgent as it appears to be. I beg that you will be seated, señor, and I will do my best to have the information found for you forthwith.”

Then, as George seated himself, the acting Commandant rang a bell, in response to which a messenger appeared, to whom he gave certain instructions, whereupon the man vanished, and Don Manuel, taking a chair on the opposite side of the table to that at which George was sitting, began a somewhat constrained conversation upon indifferent subjects, which was interrupted by the appearance of a servant with wine and three handsome cups of chased silver. Saint Leger, however, coldly but courteously declined refreshments of any kind; he resolved that he would do nothing which could by any possibility be construed into either tacit consent to methods of delay or an acceptance of proffered friendship; he was there as an enemy and an avenger, and he was determined to keep this fact prominently to the fore; consequently the constraint rapidly grew until, so far as Don Manuel at least was concerned, it became unendurable, and, rising, he begged that his visitors would excuse him, upon the plea that he desired to expedite matters by personally directing the search for the required information.

And apparently the stimulus of his presence was successful, for after an absence of about a quarter of an hour he returned, bearing in his hand a book between the pages of which slips of paper had been inserted to mark the positions of certain entries.

"There," he exclaimed, in a tone of satisfaction, as he laid the book upon the table and opened it, "by a stroke of singular good fortune, señor, we have been able to at once lay our hands upon the record which will furnish you with the information you require. Here, for instance, is the first entry, giving the names of the Englishmen who were captured upon the occasion to which you refer. They number forty-three, and their names are as follows." He proceeded to read out the names of the unfortunate ones, among which occurred that of Hubert Saint Leger—"a namesake of your own, señor," commented Don Manuel. "Was he, perchance, a relative of yours?"

"He was my brother, señor," answered George, tersely. "Read on, if you please."

The end of the list was soon reached; and then George said: "I am obliged to you, señor. Now, in the first place, I must trouble you for a copy of that list, with a statement opposite each name setting forth the manner in which that person was dealt with."

"Certainly, señor," answered Don Manuel, politely; "that information also I believe we can afford you. If you will permit me I will summon my clerk to prepare the list you require."

George bowed his acquiescence; the clerk was sent for; and after about an hour's work the list was completed and handed to the young Englishman, who took it and, having glanced carefully through it, said:

"I am obliged to you, Don Manuel. I see that, of the forty-three prisoners taken, ten died of their wounds, in prison; seventeen, of whom my brother was one, were sentenced to the galleys, and sixteen were claimed by your Inquisition. Can you afford me any further information with regard to the seventeen who were sentenced to the galleys; as, for example, the name of the galley to which each man was consigned, and where those galleys may be looked for at the present moment?"

"No, señor," answered Don Manuel, "I regret to say that I cannot. They were all put on board a ship called the *San Mathias*, and sent in her to Nombre de Dios, where, if you will hear more of them, you must e'en go and enquire."

"I thank you, señor," answered George quietly, ignoring a certain suggestion of insolence in the other's concluding remark. "And now, as to the sixteen who were surrendered to the Inquisition. What can you tell me concerning them?"

"Nothing, señor," answered Don Manuel, at length displaying some signs of uneasiness. "When the Holy Office claims a man, that man disappears from the public ken, generally for ever; or if he is seen again it is only when he figures in the *auto-da-fé*, dressed in a San Benito. Pardon, Señor Capitano, but this is a matter upon which I can afford you no information, and which I must absolutely refuse to discuss with you, or anyone."

"Very well," said George, "be it so. But I suppose you will have no objection to inform me whereabouts the Inquisition building is to be found?"

"Where it is to be found?" reiterated Don Manuel. "Why assuredly—. But stay. What is your object in requiring that particular bit of information, señor?"

"Merely that I have business there, a call to make," answered George, imperturbably.

"Business! a call!" reiterated the soldier. "Surely, señor, it is not possible that you, a heretic, intend to force your sinful way into the presence of the holy fathers, and to—to—. Saints and angels! I will be no party to such a blasphemous proceeding. If that be your intention, señor, seek your information elsewhere; I will not imperil my soul by assisting, in ever so indirect a manner, an act of sacrilege."

"As you will, señor," answered George, calmly. "But I would have you remember that by delaying me in the performance of the task which I have undertaken, you are jeopardising the city and all in it. If I am delayed—"

"Pray say no more, noble señor," interrupted the alcalde. "There is nothing to be gained, Don Manuel, by withholding from the illustrious Adelantado the information which he seeks; for if you will not give it, others will. And—a word in your ear, señor. If anything should happen to these Englishmen while they are in the city, their comrades will most fearfully avenge themselves upon us. They have left us no room to doubt what will happen in such a case, and they are the kind of men who will carry out their threats to the very last letter. Therefore, see to it, my friend, that steps are taken to prevent your soldiery from interfering with or molesting them in any way. For, should anything untoward happen, you will be held responsible. Now, I have warned you. See to it!"

"*Bueno!* señor alcalde, you are my superior, and since those are your orders, I will obey them," answered Don Manuel. "Nevertheless," he continued, "if the Commandant were well enough to take the command, I know what he would do. He would arrest and imprison these audacious strangers, and defy their comrades to do their worst. Moreover, señor, I should not like to be in your shoes when the news of this disgraceful business reaches the ears of his Excellency the Viceroy."

And, so saying, he bowed with exaggerated politeness to George and the alcalde, and with a fierce twist of his moustache strode swaggeringly out of the room.

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## Chapter Nine.

### How George visited the Holy Inquisition at San Juan.

"A good man, in many respects; a very excellent man, indeed," observed the alcalde, nodding toward the door by which Don Manuel had just quitted the apartment, "and admirable in the position which he occupies. As a soldier

merely, he is all that one could possibly desire, brave to recklessness, and an admirable leader. But after all he is only a soldier fighting is his trade, but he knows nothing whatever about diplomacy; he does not understand that there is not only a time when men should fight but also a time when, if they are wise, they should forbear. It is a fortunate thing for us all, illustrious señor, that I and not he happens to be in authority at the present juncture; and I beg that you will not permit his cavalier-like behaviour to influence you in the slightest degree. And now, noble Captain, if you have quite completed your business here, I will point out to you the way to the Inquisition, for time is pressing, and I am most anxious that no untoward accident shall occur to interfere with or delay your business in San Juan. And—I know not what may be the nature of your errand with the Holy Office, but, if I may be permitted to offer a suggestion, I would very strongly advise—nay more, I would most earnestly entreat—that you do nothing to wound the religious susceptibilities of the inhabitants, who regard the Inquisition, and all connected with it, with the utmost veneration and dread.”

“Probably with even greater dread than veneration, eh, Don Juan?” remarked George, as he took up his hat and prepared to follow the alcalde out of the building.

“Possibly, señor; possibly,” replied the alcalde, with reservation, as he led the way.

Nothing more was said until the pair reached the street and rejoined Basset and his little band of armed men, who stood placidly facing a crowd of nearly a hundred men principally composed of the more lawless and ruffianly element which is to be found in the lower quarters of every city.

The alcalde regarded this sullen-looking, but as yet merely passively hostile crowd for some moments with an expression of considerable alarm and misgiving; then, moved by the urgency of the occasion, he waved his hand to claim attention, and made a little speech in which he first rebuked the gathering for its discourtesy to the visitors by standing gaping at them as though they were so many wild beasts, after which he commanded them to disperse, warning them at the same time to interfere with the strangers at their peril, informing them that he would very severely punish any person who should dare to do so, and at the same time reminding them that the said strangers, though few, were trained soldiers, fully armed, who would themselves be quick to avenge the slightest interference or insult. He stood there until the last of the surly, scowling ruffians had moved slowly and unwillingly away, their movements finally hastened by the emergence of a party of soldiers from another wing of the building, and then, when they had all vanished, he furtively indicated to George the way to the Inquisition, and hurriedly removed himself from the scene.

The Inquisition was situated at a distance of some ten minutes' march from the Grand Plaza, and proved to be, when the party of Englishmen reached it, an extensive forbidding-looking, prison-like structure built of massive masonry, and apparently strong enough to withstand anything short of an attack by ordnance. The entrance consisted of an archway some twelve feet wide fitted with a pair of enormously thick iron-studded oaken doors, in one of which was a small wicket fitted with a grille. An iron chain, with a hand grip attached to its lower extremity, depending from a hole in the wall, indicated the means of communication with the interior, and this George tugged at violently, with the result that a loud bell immediately set up a furious clanging somewhere in the interior of the building. After an interval of nearly a minute this summons was replied to by a hooded friar who, having drawn the slide of the grille, peered out through the opening and querulously demanded to know who it was who raised such a clangour, and what was his business, to which George, who was the only person visible from the aperture of the grille, replied that he was a stranger who had urgent business of a strictly private nature with the Father Superior. Whereupon the slide of the grille was sharply closed, and the party faintly heard the shuffling footsteps of the friar receding.

After an absence of nearly ten minutes the friar re-appeared at the grille, with a demand to be informed of the stranger's name and the precise nature of his business with the Holy Father, to which George replied that it was useless for him to give his name, since it was quite unknown to the Father Superior, and that his business was not only most urgent but was for the Holy Father's ear alone, and that it was imperative that he should be admitted without an instant's unnecessary delay. A further and somewhat longer wait then ensued, and Basset was strongly urging the desirability of an attempt to burst the wicket open when the friar appeared for the third time and, shooting certain heavy bolts on the inside of the wicket, flung it open. To push his way in was for George the work of but a moment, when, to the dismay and indignation of the gatekeeper, he was instantly followed by eleven soldiers, armed to the teeth.

“The keys!” exclaimed George, to Basset. “Take his keys from him, lock the gate, and station two men here as sentries, with orders to allow no one to leave the building. That is well,” as his orders were obeyed. “Now, the rest of you, follow me. Lead the way, old man, to the quarters of the Father Superior; I must see him forthwith. Are you the keeper also of the keys which give access to the cells?” to the friar who had admitted them.

“No,” answered the cowering creature. “The gaoler carries those. But what would you with them, thou man of violence? No one is permitted to enter the cells without the permission of the Father Superior.”

“Lead me to him, then,” repeated George. “Captain Basset,” he continued, “I will take two men with me. Take you the remainder and secure every door giving access to the exterior of this building. No man must on any account be allowed to leave it, for if that should happen, they will raise the inhabitants of the town upon us, and there will be bloodshed, which I wish to avoid, if possible. Now, sir,” to the friar, “lead the way.”

While Basset marched off the remaining half-dozen of his men to execute George's order, the latter, accompanied by two soldiers, followed his unwilling guide into the main building and down a long corridor to a door, at which the friar knocked with a trembling hand.

“Enter!” responded a voice in Spanish, whereupon George, gently pushing his guide aside and beckoning the two soldiers to follow him, threw open the door and passed into the apartment. It was a large and very handsomely furnished room, containing a table, sofa, several lounging chairs, and a large book-case, full of books, facing the two

wide and lofty windows which lighted the room and which looked out upon a spacious, beautifully kept garden. On one wall hung a large crucifix, the cross made of ebony while the exquisitely carved figure of the crucified Christ was of ivory, fastened to the cross with golden nails, while the crown of thorns which encircled the drooping head was also made of gold. Two large pictures, one of which represented the Descent from the Cross, and the other the Entombment, hung on either side of the crucifix; and the opposite wall was occupied by a very large and beautiful painting depicting the Apotheosis of the Virgin Mother.

At the entrance of the three armed men a tall and dignified figure clad in priestly garments rose from the table and, with a ringer inserted between the pages of a book which he had been reading, haughtily demanded, in Spanish:

“Who are you, sir; and what is the meaning of this unseemly—this audacious—intrusion upon my privacy?”

George replied to this question by asking another. “Am I right,” he demanded, “in supposing you to be the Right Reverend Father Superior of this institution?”

“And if I am, what then?” demanded the other.

“Only that you are the man I happen to want,” replied George. “I am an Englishman,” he continued, “and the captain of a ship which holds this city at her mercy. I and my companions have come all the way from England to avenge the most foul and treacherous attack made by your Viceroy upon a fleet of English ships in this harbour, last year; and, incidentally, to call you, sir, to account for your treatment of certain of the prisoners taken upon that occasion, who were delivered into your hands. I have here—”

“But—but—” interrupted the Father Superior—for such was the individual upon whose privacy George had so unceremoniously intruded—“I do not understand. Why have you been permitted to come here? Where are our soldiers, and what are they doing—?”

“Have I not already explained that the town is at my mercy?” interrupted George in his turn. “What further enlightenment do you need? As to your soldiers, they dare not interfere with me, for my ship’s guns command the town, and my crew have orders to destroy the place if any attempt is made to resist me. Now, I have a list here”—drawing it from his pocket—“containing the names of sixteen men who, I am told, were claimed by this Inquisition; and my business with you is to demand an account of them. Where are they, and what have you done to them?”

“How, in the name of all the saints, can I possibly answer your question, señor, unless you furnish me with the names of the men you refer to?” demanded the priest, with a valiant attempt to brazen the matter out, but there was a quaver in his voice which betrayed that he was beginning to feel anxious, if not actually apprehensive, concerning the outcome of this astounding business.

“There is the list, señor,” answered George, laying the document on the table. “Take it, I pray you, and let me have an instant reply to my demand.”

The Father Superior took the list and ran his eye over it, ponderingly. Then he laid it down again and said:

“Señor Englishman, I cannot possibly answer your question offhand, for I do not tax my memory to recollect exactly how every person who enters the walls of this building has been dealt with. But if you will suffer me to ring for my secretary I have no doubt that, with his assistance, I can furnish you with the information you require.”

“By all means,” assented George; and the Father Superior thereupon turned to the wall and jerked a bell rope. A slight interval followed, and then a very frightened priest entered.

“Holy Father,” he began, “the building is in the possession of armed men—” and then, catching sight for the first time of George and the two soldiers, who were standing somewhat in the shadow, he stopped short, at the same time making the sign of the Cross.

“Yes, proceed, Fray Matthew,” exhorted the other. “You were saying that the building is in the possession of armed men. What else?”

“They have taken the gaoler, your Eminence, locked him in one of his own cells, and are now liberating the prisoners including one whom they have taken out of the very torture chamber itself.”

“Is this true, señor?” demanded the Father Superior. “And, if so, is this sacrilege being committed by your orders?”

“I know not whether that man’s story is true or not,” said George, “but I think it exceedingly probable; and, if so, it is certainly being done by my orders. As to the sacrilege of the thing—” the young man shrugged his shoulders expressively.

The Holy Father also shrugged his shoulders, as though to say—“Well, if you are struck dead, don’t blame me; it will only be what you richly deserve.” Then he turned to Fray Matthew.

“Fray,” he said, “bring me hither the book containing the record of persons admitted to the Inquisition during the past year, with particulars of the manner in which they have been dealt with.”

The priest, with another frightened glance at George and the two stolid-looking soldiers, hurriedly retired; and as he vanished through the doorway the Father Superior coolly turned his back upon the Englishman and, sauntering to the nearest window, stood gazing contemplatively through it into the garden, which, George observed, was all ablaze with tropical flora. And there he remained, taking not the slightest notice of his self-invited visitors until, after an absence of some ten minutes, the Fray returned, bearing two enormous books under his arm, the which he laid upon the table. Then, sauntering back to the table as leisurely as he had left it, the Holy Father took up the list which



George had handed to him, considered it for a moment, opened one of the two books which had been brought to him, referred to an index, and then turned over the pages of the book until he found the one which he wanted. Then he ran his finger down a column, paused, and looked up.

"Here," he said, looking up and addressing George, "is the entry referring to the first man on your list. It states that, after having been put to the question in various ways, he died, on—such a date, in his cell."

"Thank you," said George. "Now, before we go any farther, I must ask you to kindly explain exactly what you mean when you speak of a man being 'put to the question.'"

For the first time the Father Superior exhibited distinct symptoms of uneasiness. He hesitated perceptibly, and at length replied:

"The expression refers to certain means which are adopted in extreme cases when, for instance, the subject displays great obduracy, to persuade him to renounce his heresy, accept the canons of the true faith, and humbly sue for admission into the bosom of the Catholic Church."

"But that only partially answers my question," retorted George. "You speak of 'certain means which are adopted in extreme cases.' What, precisely, is the nature of those means to which you refer?"

The Holy Father's uneasiness visibly increased, and he began to fence with the question.

"I take it," he said, after some consideration, "that you, my son, are a heretic, otherwise you would not be ignorant of the meaning of the expressions which I have used. That being the case, it seems necessary for me to explain that the Holy Inquisition is an institution which has been established for the especial purpose of saving the souls of heathens and heretics, even at the expense of their bodies, if need be. The human soul is of infinitely greater value than the human body; and it has been found that physical pain exerts a most beneficent influence upon those obdurate ones who evince a disinclination to accept the—the—"

"Thanks," interrupted George; "I will not trouble you to go on, for I think I now clearly understand what putting a person to the question means. It means, does it not—in plain, unvarnished language—the infliction upon an individual of such excruciating, such diabolical, torment that in most cases the individual will agree to anything you choose to suggest, will accept any kind of doctrine you choose to thrust upon him, rather than submit to further tortures?"

"Well—of course—that is putting the matter very, very crudely," admitted the Father Superior; "still, regarding the statement broadly, it is—well—in the main—very nearly true. But there is this to be said, this very important—"

"Quite unnecessary, I assure you," interposed George. "The broad fact is that you convert by means of bodily torment; and in some cases—where, as you say, 'the subject displays great obduracy,' the torment is so extreme and so protracted that the unhappy wretch dies under it. Is not that so?"

"Yes—if you choose to so put it," answered the Father Superior, "that is so. But again I must protest against the extreme crudity, the—"

"And," interrupted George, "this poor unfortunate fellow, the first on my list, is one of those who so died, is he not?"

"Really, señor," protested the Holy Father—"you—you—are not—are not giving—this matter—quite—quite fair—"

"Answer me, señor, without equivocation; did, or did not this man, of whom we are now speaking, die as the result of your hellish torments?" rapped out George, suddenly becoming exasperated and heavily smiting the table with his clenched fist.

"Reverend Father," here interposed Fray Matthew, who could scarcely articulate because of his chattering teeth, "I pray you give me leave to retire. The violence of this heretic, this man of blood, frightens me."

"No," answered George, before the other could speak. "Being here, you will remain. It is possible that I may need you to supply me with information which your superior may be unwilling or unable to give. Now, señor"—turning to the Father Superior—"answer me."

"Then—since you insist," replied the Father Superior, "I can only reply that the man certainly did die as the result of being put to the question."

"Very well," returned George, taking up the list and making a note upon it. "Now, as to the next one?"

And again the long, tedious process of question and equivocation was gone through, over and over, until every name upon the list had been dealt with, when it finally appeared that, of the sixteen unhappy Englishmen who had become involved in the meshes of that terrible institution, the Holy Inquisition, no less than six had been burnt alive at the stake in the last *auto-da-fé*, seven had died miserably as the result of the torments to which they had been subjected, and a poor residue of three only still languished in their cells!

"And," demanded George, when he had studied and fully digested the details of this terrible list—"who is responsible for this tremendous accumulation of ghastly human suffering and these hellish murders? You?"

"No, thank God! not I," asserted the Father Superior, now trembling for his life, and with all his recent arrogance completely evaporated. "I am merely the Head of the strictly ecclesiastical section of the institution; I have nothing whatever to do with the proselytising, which is undertaken by, and is entirely in the hands of, the Grand Inquisitor and his assistants."

"And where," asked George, "are these people to be found?"

"They are probably in—the—the—room—where—in which—persons are put to—to—the question," was the stammered reply.

"Ah!" exclaimed George. "I presume you mean the place which the fray, here, has more briefly designated as the 'torture chamber.' Very well; I must see the place, and also the Grand Inquisitor and his assistants; I have something very important to say to those—'m—people. Lead the way, reverend señor, if you please." Then, turning to the two armed men who guarded the door, he added—"Take charge of these two men. For the present, they are prisoners."

The Father Superior possessed a certain knowledge of English, for as the last words passed George's lips the terrified ecclesiastic quavered:

"Prisoners, señor? Prisoners? What—what—do you mean? How dare you interfere with my liberty? This is downright, rank sacrilege; and if you dare to treat any of the inmates of this institution—and especially any members of the Holy Office—otherwise than with the utmost deference, you will—will—suffer severely for it."

"Pray lead on, señor," retorted George, waving the agitated man toward the door. "Surely you must realise by this time that the institution and all within it are in my power. And I am what you please to term a 'heretic'; the thunders of your Church have no terrors for me; I regard you and your associates merely as men who have been guilty of certain most atrocious crimes, and I am here for the express purpose of punishing the guilty ones."

The Father Superior evidently realised that, after this, there was no more to be said, and, between the two men-at-arms, and closely followed by the shivering fray, he accordingly passed out of the room and down a long corridor, into another, until a small door was reached, which, with evident fear and reluctance, he at length threw open, disclosing a most remarkable scene.

The chamber thus revealed was a very large and lofty one, lighted by three large windows set high in the wall and heavily grated outside. And although the windows were all wide open, the atmosphere was oppressively close, and it was also charged with a very peculiar odour, evidently arising in part at least from the fumes of an ignited charcoal brazier, containing several curious-looking iron instruments thrust deep into its glowing heart. Immediately under the windows, and running the entire width of the chamber, was a platform or dais, some three feet high, the front portion of which was occupied by a long table, behind which were ranged nine chairs, the middle chair being of a much more ornate character than the rest, the carving of it being ecclesiastical in character, and upon the table, before each chair, was a supply of paper, pens and ink. The dais was a wooden structure, and was carpeted with black material; the tablecloth also was black, with the sacred monogram I.H.S. above a cross and surmounted by a crown of thorns embroidered upon it in silver thread. The floor of the remaining part of the chamber was flagged with paving slabs, and was bare, while the walls and ceiling were coloured black. In the centre of the wall behind the dais, between two of the four windows, hung an enormous crucifix, the figure of the Redeemer, very finely carved in wood and realistically painted in the colours of nature, being life-size. At the end of the room opposite the dais was an engine or machine which even those who had never seen such a thing before might easily have identified as a rack; and there were four chairs, two on either side of the room, of such elaborate and sinister construction that there could be no question as to their being designed for the purpose of inflicting various kinds of ingenious and exquisite agony upon the unhappy occupants; while, in addition to these there was an instrument which clearly betrayed itself as a specimen of the notorious "boot." Hung here and there upon the walls were other curious-looking instruments, the uses of which were not so readily determinable; and there were also a number of suggestive and sinister-looking ropes and pulleys depending from the ceiling.

Such a room, so furnished, could not possibly fail to fix the attention of any person entering it for the first time, even in the character of a mere spectator, and George Saint Leger gazed about him for quite a minute with a feeling of keen curiosity that rapidly changed to mingled horror and anger as he began to recognise the character and purpose of the several objects that met his gaze; and then he turned to its occupants; for although, in order to present a clear and unconfused picture of the chamber, only its inanimate contents have thus far been referred to, the room was by no means empty of human occupants. On the contrary, in addition to those who had already entered, immediately inside the door, one on either side of it, stood two of Basset's men-at-arms, with drawn swords and cocked pistols in their hands, while the nine chairs on the dais were occupied by nine motionless figures completely shrouded in garments of black cloth, wearing upon their heads a curious pointed head-dress, also of black cloth, which completely hid their heads and faces, but in which two holes were cut for them to see through. Seated in one of the torture chairs, but with the torturing apparatus now thrown out of gear, was a most dreadful-looking object bearing the semblance of a terribly emaciated man, worn to mere skin and bone by privation and suffering, clad in rags, his hair and beard long and unkempt, his skin and features white and bloodless, his eyes dim with anguish, the sweat of keen protracted agony still pouring out of him, while three ruffianly-looking men clad in scarlet ministered to him under Basset's supervision. A fourth figure in scarlet lay motionless upon the nagged floor, his attitude proclaiming that death had suddenly overtaken him, while a blue-rimmed puncture in the centre of his forehead, from which blood still trickled, told clearly enough the manner of his death.

For a long minute young Saint Leger gazed about him with fast increasing horror as he realised the diabolical purpose of the several engines that met his eye; then, gaspingly, he spoke.

"So!" he ejaculated. "This is the chamber in which you torture your fellow creatures until in their agony they are fain to say whatever it pleases you that they should say, even to denying their faith, is it, señor?"

"Nay, señor," answered the Father Superior, "say not that it is / who do these things. I have already repudiated all responsibility for what happens in this chamber. It is the Grand Inquisitor and his Assistant Inquisitors who reign supreme here. There they sit; ask them."

George stalked across to the middle of the chamber, and wheeled about, facing the row of nine motionless figures occupying the chairs.

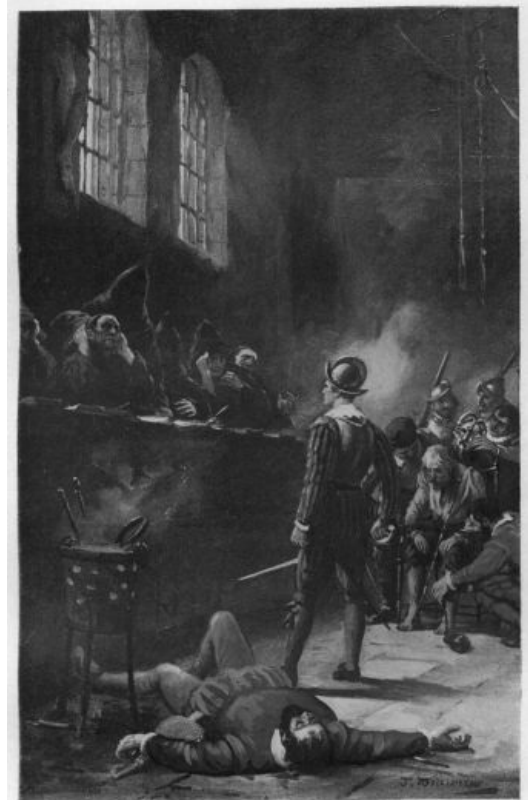
"I mean to do so," he said, tersely. Then, addressing the nine, he said:

"Señors, I have somewhat to say to you. But, first of all, be good enough to remove your hoods, that I may see your faces. I like not to talk with men whose features are hidden from me."

For a moment there was silence in the room, broken only by the low murmurings of Basset, who was speaking to the unfortunate "subject" in the chair. Then the figure occupying the middle chair on the dais rose to his feet and, stretching forth a long bony arm which projected to beyond the wrist from the loose sleeve of his black robe, said:

"Depart, presumptuous youth! Go hence quickly, and take those misguided men, thy minions, with thee, lest I call down the wrath of Holy Mother Church upon thy sacrilegious head—and theirs. Who art thou, that thou should'st dare to—"

"Reverend señor," interrupted George, unceremoniously, "a fig for you and your sacrilege"—and he snapped his fingers contemptuously. "The wrath of thy Holy Mother Church has no terrors for me, though—understand me—I can respect any man's religion, so long as he is sincere, and so long as he is willing to respect that of others and permit them to worship God in their own way. But, enough of this; I am not here to discuss theological questions, but to right a great wrong and to avenge fiendish crime and cruelty perpetrated in the sacred name of Him whose effigy hangs



AND, SO SAYING, HE SEATED HIMSELF AND PROCEEDED TO REMOVE HIS OWN HEAD-COVERING. *The Crucifixion of the "Nuncio."* p. 131.

upon yonder cross behind you. Therefore I say once more, uncover, let me see your faces—unless indeed you prefer that we should lay our sacrilegious hands upon you and remove your head-coverings ourselves!"

"The Saints forbid!" ejaculated the Grand Inquisitor in horror. "Anything rather than that!"

Then, turning to his companions, right and left, he added—"Uncover, my Brothers, since this heretical Englishman will have it so. It is not meet that we, the pillars of the Holy Catholic Church, unworthy though we be, should submit to insult and indignity at the hands of a pack of godless Lutheran dogs." And, so saying, he seated himself and proceeded to remove his own head-covering, disclosing lean, ascetic features, cold, cruel, and domineering, crowned by the monk's tonsure. At the same time the others did the same, and with very similar result, the dominant expression of the faces thus disclosed being that of cold, stern ruthlessness, tempered, it must be confessed, in some cases, with very evident signs of fear.

"So! that is better," commented George. "Now, señors," he continued, "I am not going to make a long business of my talk with you, for we have already wasted far too much time in this accursed building. I have but a few questions to ask; and you will do well to answer them briefly and to the point. This chamber, I perceive, is what is usually termed in the outside world, 'the torture chamber'; and I gather that it is here you subject those whom you stigmatise as heretics to unspeakable torments for the purpose of compelling them to forswear themselves and embrace your religion against their will. Now, which of you is responsible for the hellish suffering that goes on from time to time within these four walls?"

"Since you insist upon our replying to your insolent questions," answered the Grand Inquisitor, contemptuously, "know, young man, that none is more responsible than another. We whom you see seated here are appointed by our Order to promote the honour and interest of the Church of which we are most humble and unworthy members, by

winning souls to her, and converting the heathen and heretics generally to the true faith. We have various methods of doing this. In the first instance we use teaching, persuasion, exhortation; and sometimes these methods suffice. But when they fail—as they do sometimes, in the case of the contumacious, there is a blessed power in bodily suffering which, loath as we are to employ it, we force ourselves to resort to, convinced that, by saving the soul at the cost of the body, we are doing a righteous and merciful thing. But even in inflicting suffering we are merciful, for we regulate the amount and quality of the suffering by the extent of the contumacy of the subject, making it light and transient at the first, and only increasing it in sharpness and duration when we find the other insufficient. And in all cases the character of the punishment is the subject of long and anxious deliberation, in which we all join, and no punishment of any kind is ever inflicted until we all—I and my eight Brothers here—are agreed as to its expediency, character, and amount. Also we are always present upon such occasions, in order that the punishment may be stopped upon the instant that conversion takes place.”

“I see,” said George. “Are you all agreed”—addressing the assistants, “that what your Grand Inquisitor has stated is the exact truth?”

“*Sí, sí*; yes, we are all agreed,” came first from one and then another, until all had spoken.

“Then,” continued George, “I am to take it that you are all alike equally responsible for what is done in this chamber?”

It was evident that a large proportion of the Assistant Inquisitors were inclined to jib at the word “responsible”; but the young Captain insisted upon each man giving a categorical reply to the question; and in the end, stimulated further by the stern looks of the Grand Inquisitor, they all replied in the affirmative.

“Very good,” commented George. “Now, I have but one other question to ask. Is it you, as a body, who condemn certain of your victims to the hideous fate of being burnt alive in the *auto-da-fé*?”

Even the Grand Inquisitor, hitherto in a great measure blinded by his bigotry, and his absolute faith in the sanctity of his office and the complete protection which it afforded him, blanched at the directness and significance of this last question; but still, unable even now to fully realise the awful danger in which he stood, he gave a somewhat rambling and excusatory reply which, however, was a full admission of responsibility for the deed with which George charged him and his associates.

“Good!” said George; “you have now afforded me all the information which I desired to obtain. All that remains for you, señors, is to make your peace with God as best you can; for I have constituted myself the avenger of all the accumulated agony that the walls of this chamber and the stones of the Grand Plaza have witnessed; and within the next half-hour *you die!*”

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## Chapter Ten.

### How the plate ships sought to escape from San Juan.

“We die?” reiterated the Grand Inquisitor, now at last fully awakened to the tremendous gravity of the situation. “And pray, señor, at whose behest do we die?”

“At mine, most reverend señor,” answered George, simply. “Have I not yet succeeded in making that clear to you?”

“That means, then, that you intend to murder us?” demanded the Grand Inquisitor, with pale, tremulous lips.

“Señores,” replied George, in a tone of finality, “it matters not to me how you choose to designate your impending execution. Call it murder, if the expression affords you any satisfaction. I call it an act of stern justice, the richly merited punishment due to a long series of atrociously inhuman crimes committed by you, if not actually with your own hands, at least by your orders. Such crimes as you and your associates have most callously and cold-bloodedly committed under the cloak of religion deserve a far more severe punishment than the mere deprivation of life, and if I were constituted like yourselves I should make that deprivation of life a long, lingering agony, a slow death of exquisite torment, such as you have inflicted upon countless victims; but torture is indescribably repugnant to the mind of an Englishman, therefore I intend to carry out the death-sentence which I have passed upon you, as mercifully as possible, by causing you to be shot—with one exception, that exception being in the case of the Grand Inquisitor, whom I purpose to hang, as an example to others. And I have taken upon myself the terrible task and responsibility of execution, for the simple reason that there is no other who will do so; and justice *must* be satisfied. And now, having said all that there is to be said, I leave you all to prepare for death as best you may.” Whereupon, the young man, with stern, set face, turned away and walked over to Basset, who was still doing what he could to alleviate the sufferings of the latest victim to the Inquisition’s merciless methods of conversion.

“Well, Basset,” he said, indicating the unfortunate individual in the chair, “whom have we here? He looks to me something like an Englishman.”

“So he be,” answered Basset. “He says his name be Job Winter, and that he was one of the crew of Admiral Hawkins’ ship, the *Minion*. He’ve been in this hell upon earth since last August, and all that time they fiends in human form up there,” indicating the occupants of the dais, “have been trying their hardest to make a good Catholic of him. And this is how they’ve been doing it. Look to mun.” And very gently and tenderly the soldier disclosed certain horrible and blood-curdling injuries very recently inflicted, together with a number of healed and half-healed scars which bore eloquent testimony to a long period of dreadful torment. So frightful was the sight that both the beholders fairly reeled under the horrible qualm of sickness and repulsion induced by it, and if anything further was needed to confirm the young Captain in his full determination to make an example of the Inquisitors, he found it in the revolting

spectacle before him.

"My poor dear man," he said, his voice quivering with compassion, "what you must have suffered! But, cheer up; we are Englishmen and Devon men, like yourself, and one of our purposes in coming here was to deliver you out of the hands of these Spanish devils, and we'll do it, too. We've a good surgeon aboard our ship, and you shall be in his hands this very day, please God. Are there any more of you in this place?"

"He doesn't know, poor soul," answered Basset, interposing, "but I do; there be two more Englishmen that we've found in the cells; and they'm almost so bad as this man. We found 'em safely locked up; but they'm out now and being taken care of by our men."

"Can they walk?" demanded George.

"A few yards, perhaps," surmised Basset, "but not so far as the wharf."

"Then they must be carried," decided George. "And these men," indicating the scarlet-garbed individuals, whose business it evidently was to actually carry out the fiendish commands of the Inquisitors—"shall help to do it. I dare say we can find all the additional help we need somewhere in this building. I will go out and see to it; and, meanwhile, you will remain here and see that none of these persons escape."

"Ay, ay," responded Basset, "I'll take care of that, trust me. I don't think there'll be any trouble, after the example I made of that fellow," pointing to the prostrate figure on the paved floor. "The rascal presumed to dispute my authority when I came in here and told everybody that they were prisoners, and—there a be! No, I don't think there'll be any more trouble."

Whereupon George passed from the terrible chamber with its fearful evidences of the dreadful lengths to which misguided fanaticism will occasionally carry men, even in the cause of religion, and proceeded to busy himself in making all the arrangements necessary for the comfortable conveyance of the three unfortunate victims of Inquisitional cruelty down to the ship.

The thing was done! Righteously, or unrighteously, it was done at last, and the little party of stern, inflexible-visaged Englishmen emerged from the Inquisition building of San Juan de Ulua grouped protectively round the three litters in which lay the quivering, emaciated, anguished bodies of their fellow-countrymen, delivered, against all hope, from a fate a thousand times worse than any ordinary kind of death, while within the gloomy, forbidding walls of the building they left behind them nine corpses as a warning and example that, even in that far-off land, Englishmen might not be tortured to death with impunity. It was a terrible demonstration of crude, primitive justice; and whether or not it was as effective in inculcating a lesson as it was intended to be, it is now impossible to say; but one thing at least is certain, that from that time forward there is no record of any Englishman having ever been received into the Inquisition at San Juan.

The party reached the ship unmolested, although they naturally attracted a great deal of attention during their passage through the streets. How it would have been with them during that short march if the inhabitants of the city had been aware of the terrible tragedy which had just been enacted within the walls of the Inquisition can never be known, possibly it might have resulted in a still more terrible tragedy in the streets, with far-reaching results upon the city itself, but Saint Leger believed that he had taken every possible precaution against such an occurrence.

As events proved, however, there was one precaution which he had omitted to take; he should have insisted upon the arrest by the alcalde of Don Manuel Reberia, the acting Commandant, upon that individual's display of hostility at the termination of their interview with him; and this George had not done. Now, Don Manuel was both a bigoted Catholic and a Government official. He was one of those who held that the Church—and in his case the term included every individual belonging to the Church—could do no wrong; even the atrocities of the Inquisition, which many devout Catholics secretly reprobated, were to him perfectly justifiable, and the institution itself as sacred as the cathedral; and the suspicion aroused within him by George's question as to the whereabouts of the building—that this little band of autocratic, domineering heretics meditated an invasion of its sacred precincts, possibly with the intention of perpetrating some act of violence therein, and in any case desecrating it by their intrusion—stirred his fanatical religious rancour to boiling point, while the fact that those same heretics held the town—a possession of his Most Catholic Majesty—at their mercy, was not only as great an offence from his patriotic point of view, but he also felt that it inflicted a deep stain upon his honour as a Spanish soldier, which he was resolved to wipe out, if possible.

These feelings he had wit enough to understand he must conceal from George and the alcalde, and he contrived to do so pretty successfully; but the effort only caused them to gall and rankle the more intolerably, and when, at the termination of his interview with them, he quitted their presence with a certain scarcely veiled hint of insolence in his manner, he was in the throes of a perfect frenzy of anger and humiliation; in the precise frame of mind, in fact, as that of the man who, forgetting everything but his own grievances, is ready to commit any crime, however atrocious, in order to avenge himself and salve his wounded feelings. Too often, unhappily, reflection does not come until it is too late, and the crime has been perpetrated, and Don Manuel's first impulse was to muster his soldiers, follow after the Englishmen, and slay them, if possible, before they should reach the Inquisition building. But as he hurried toward the barracks with this fell intention, he realised that what he meditated was impossible; before he could muster his soldiers and put them upon the track, the Englishmen would have reached their goal; and once within the massive walls of the building, they would be safe. But there was no reason, he told himself, why they should not be attacked as they came out—and here his meditations came to a sudden halt. There *was* a very good reason, which was that, even if his meditated attack should prove successful, only a paltry dozen of Englishmen would fall, and their comrades would remain to wreak a terrible retribution, in the course of which he, among others, would have to pay the full penalty. No, that would not do at all; it was not that Don Manuel Reberia was a coward; very far from it; but with the speed of thought he pictured to himself the happenings that must inevitably follow the perpetration of an act of such base treachery as he meditated; he saw in imagination the execution of the hostages—among whom, he

suddenly remembered, were one or two very dear friends of his own; the bombardment of the town, with the concomitant slaughter of women and children as well as men; the exasperation of the citizens at the author of the deed which had brought such a frightful calamity upon them, and his own arrest and summary execution. No; that would not do; he was not in the least afraid to face death in fair fight, but to be arrested by his own countrymen, handed over by them to the hated English, and publicly hanged by the latter from one of the yard-arms of their ship—No; he could not face that ignominy.

Then what was to be done—for something he was determined to do? He somehow found his way back to the private room in his quarters, and there, flinging himself into a chair, set himself to think. And gradually from out the chaos of his thoughts there emerged an idea, a plan, a mad, desperate plan that, if successful, would mean the destruction or capture of the *Nonsuch* and every Englishman aboard her, which was what Reberia wanted; while, if it failed—! But it must not, should not fail; no, he would see to that. So presently he took pen and paper, and proceeded to jot down his plan of campaign, altering its details here and there as he went on, until finally he had evolved a scheme that commended itself to him as eminently satisfactory. Then he proceeded to jot down a number of names of persons whose co-operation it was necessary to secure; and, this done, he called for an orderly, who forthwith proceeded to ride hither and thither about the city, calling at this house and that and leaving instructions that the persons whom he named were to present themselves without fail at the Commandant's office at a certain hour, namely, four o'clock in the afternoon, which just gave the Commandant nice time to complete his plans before the arrival of the persons whom he had summoned to meet him.

And in due time, with very commendable punctuality, those persons turned up and were ushered into the Commandant's private office. There were some thirty of them in all, and when the whole of them were present Don Manuel proceeded to address them, at first in quick, tense tones, which gradually changed to the fiery, impassioned language and gestures characteristic of an invocation. For a man of his parts he was rather an able orator, moreover he was more profoundly stirred than, probably, he had ever before been in the whole course of his life. It is not to be greatly wondered at, therefore, that before he ended he had wrought his audience up to almost as high a pitch of ferocity and enthusiasm as himself; and when at length he reached his peroration and concluded by making a certain demand, the men who had hitherto sat listening to him sprang to their feet with one accord and vowed, by all they held sacred, that they would obey him and perform his behest, or die in the attempt. And they were all resolute, determined men, too, of the seafaring class, who looked as though they might be safely counted upon to keep their word; wherefore, as soon as their excitement had subsided sufficiently to permit of a return to business, Don Manuel drew toward him a bundle of documents which he had already prepared, and which were, in fact, temporary commissions, and distributed them, one to each man present. Then, selecting a particular memorandum from a number which were lying upon his desk, and referring to it for guidance from time to time, he proceeded to give specified instructions to each person, who, having received them, at once rose and bowed himself out, by which arrangement the party gradually dissolved and left the building one man at a time, thus reducing to a minimum the chances of attracting undue attention.

The afternoon was well advanced when at length George Saint Leger and his party returned to the *Nonsuch*, and handed over to Jack Chichester, the surgeon, the three human wrecks whom they had rescued from the clutches of the Inquisition, with special instructions that no pains were to be spared, no trouble to be regarded as too great, nothing that the ship contained too precious for the mitigation of their suffering and, as all hoped, their ultimate restoration to something approaching as nearly as might be to perfect health. It was pitiful to witness the almost incredulous joy and transport manifested by the unfortunates at finding themselves once more in the midst of their fellow-countrymen, and especially of men who spoke in the accents of that beloved Devon whose scented orchards, winding lanes, swelling moors, and lonely tors they had utterly despaired of ever again beholding. But they were sturdy fellows, too, and even broken down as they were, with their strength sapped and their courage almost quelled by long months of protracted agony and privation, they quickly recovered spirit when once they found themselves outside the gloomy precincts of the Inquisition building; and though, despite the utmost precaution and the most tender care in getting them out of the boat and up the ship's lofty side, the pain they suffered in the process must have been excruciating, they made light of it, declaring, with a laugh that moved those who heard it to tears—so hollow and pathetic was it—that such pain was less than nothing compared with the awful long-drawn-out torments to which they had almost grown accustomed!

And if the three rescued Englishmen were glad to find themselves once more, against all hope, delivered from the power of their tormentors, and comparatively safe under the shelter of the glorious Cross of Saint George, the hostages who had most unwillingly remained on board the English ship to insure the good faith of their countrymen—in which, if the truth must be told, they had no very profound belief—were scarcely less so when they saw the little party of adventurers return in safety from their desperate errand; for that return meant that one great danger at least had been safely passed, and surely now they might rely upon the citizens of San Juan to do nothing foolish. So they plucked up heart of grace, and became quite cheery and affable with the Englishmen until Heard, the purser, rather maliciously reminded them that the matter of the indemnity still remained unsettled and that many things might happen before the citizens consented to part with such an enormous sum of money. And the hostages would have felt very much more disconcerted at his remark than they actually were, had they dreamed that the Englishman was speaking truer than he knew.

By the time that the excitement attendant upon the safe return of the Captain and his escort had begun to simmer down a little, night had fallen, and those who were not on duty began to think of retiring to rest, for the day had been a long and rather trying one to all hands, and especially so to those who had been of the shore-going party. But George did not forget, nor would he allow anyone else on board to forget, that the ship was in a hostile port, surrounded on all sides by enemies; and that although, for the moment, a truce prevailed, nobody could possibly say how long that truce might last, or at what moment it might be broken. He reminded his compatriots that the harbour of San Juan de Ulua, where they now lay, was the scene of that act of stupendous treachery which it was a part of their business to avenge; he pointed out that it was the very people who now surrounded them who had perpetrated that act of treachery and were therefore quite capable of perpetrating another if they believed that they saw the

opportunity to do so successfully, and he drew their attention to the fact that although, thank God, they had a sound ship under them, they were very much fewer in numbers than those who were the victims of the tragedy of a year ago, and were consequently at least as tempting a mark as those others had been; and finally he issued his commands that the same watches should be maintained as though the ship were at sea, and that the utmost vigilance should be observed by the look-outs and especially by the officers, that the ordnance should be kept loaded, that no man should lay aside his arms, even to sleep; and that, lastly, if any craft or boat of any kind were seen to be approaching the ship during the hours of darkness, she was to be first challenged, and then fired upon if she did not immediately reply.

The night fell dark and overcast, with a brisk easterly breeze and occasional heavy rain squalls, taxing the vigilance of the look-outs to the utmost, and causing young Saint Leger to frequently quit his cabin to personally assure himself that his instructions were being carried out in their entirety. But nothing in the slightest degree suspicious was observed until shortly after three o'clock in the morning, when Dyer, the pilot, whose watch it then was, suddenly presented himself at the door of George's cabin with the startling intimation that two of the plate ships, if not three, seemed to have slipped their cables and were getting under way. "There baint a light to be seed aboard any of 'em," he reported, "and it's so dark as Tophet, but I be certain sure that two of they ships is settin' their canvas, and there be another that, to my mind, be adrift."

"But how can that be, when we have the officers of the ships aboard here?" demanded George as he sprang from his cot and followed Dyer out on deck.

"Don't know, I'm sure," answered Dyer; "but it's a fact that some of 'em be gettin' under way."

As the pair emerged from the poop cabin, they were met by Drew, the boatswain, who reported:

"There be four of 'em on the move now, Cap'n; and I baint at all sure but where there's one or two more of 'em makin' ready for a start, though the light be that bad—"

"Mr Dyer," interrupted George crisply, "let our cable be buoyed, ready for slipping, and call all hands, if you please, to fighting stations. Also, let the sail-trimmers be sent aloft to loose the canvas. We will get under way at once. It is too dark for me to see anything just now, coming directly from the lighted cabin, but I'll take your word for it that things are as you say. Evidently, there is treachery afoot again, somewhere; and it will never do to allow any of those plate ships to escape. Rather than permit that to happen, I'll sink them!"

Thereupon there ensued on board the *Nonsuch* a brief period of intense but almost silent activity, during which the severely strict discipline which Saint Leger had imposed upon his crew amply justified itself, for every man exactly knew his station and the duty which the exigencies of the moment demanded of him, and did it without the need of a single superfluous order. A few cries there were, of course, demanding that this or that rope should be let go, or intimating that such and such a sail was ready for setting, for the darkness was so intense that it was impossible to see exactly everything that was happening even aboard their own ship, nor was the work executed with quite that automatic precision and astonishing speed that is characteristic of the Navy of the present day, yet the work went forward so smoothly and rapidly that within ten minutes of the delivery of George's first order the *Nonsuch* was under way and turning to windward in pursuit of the plate ships that were cumbrously attempting to effect their escape from the harbour.

Within the next five minutes it became evident that the Spanish sailors were no match for the English, nor the Spanish ships for the *Nonsuch*; for although the former had secured a pretty good start of the latter, they had slipped their cables with only just enough canvas set to give them steerage way and enable them to avoid colliding with other ships, slowly increasing their spread of canvas as they went, whereas the *Nonsuch* hung on to her anchor until practically the whole of her working canvas was set, wherefore no sooner had the ponderous hempen cable gone smoking out through her hawse pipe than she came under command, when her extraordinary speed at once told, and she began to rapidly overhaul the ships of which she was in chase. But it was nervous work threading her way out of that crowded anchorage in the intense darkness, for there were fully fifty sail in the port, apart from the plate ships, and for some unknown reason—but probably in accordance with orders received—not one was showing a light, consequently there were several occasions when a collision was avoided only by the remarkable working qualities of the ship herself and the instantaneous response of the mariners to the orders issued from time to time from the quarter-deck.

To avoid collision with a craft lying passively at anchor was, under the circumstances, quite sufficiently difficult, but it was infinitely worse when it came to steering clear of the plate ships beating out of the harbour; and indeed something more than a mere suspicion soon took possession of the minds of the English that a deliberate attempt was being made by the Spaniards to either run them down or disable them, for whenever, in the course of manoeuvring, they drew near a Spanish ship, the latter seemed to alter her course and come blundering headlong at them, when, if a collision had chanced to have occurred, the English ship must of necessity have been the greatest sufferer, because of her inferior size. But here again the nimbleness of the *Nonsuch* and the activity of her crew sufficed to avert disaster, and ship after ship was overtaken and passed in deadly, ominous silence, for it was George's intention to make no demonstration until he had overtaken and weathered the leading ship, when he was determined to administer such a lesson as should not be readily forgotten.

And at length the fateful moment arrived, about half an hour after the *Nonsuch* had slipped her cable and slid away from her anchorage. She had overtaken and passed every ship but one, and that one was now approaching her, the two ships being on opposite tacks. It was difficult, just then, to determine which ship would weather the other; but as the distance between the two narrowed it presently became apparent that neither would weather the other, and that a collision was inevitable, unless one of the two gave way. George issued certain orders, and then walked forward, climbed the fore-castle, that he might see the better, and intently fixed his gaze upon the approaching ship. She was then about a point on the lee bow of the *Nonsuch*, and was steering such a course that, unless one or the other gave

way, the stranger must certainly strike the English ship somewhere between her stem and foremast, probably bringing down the latter, most certainly carrying away the bowsprit, and in any case rendering the *Nonsuch* unmanageable. On she came, a blot of deeper blackness upon the black background of the night, and it was clear to George that those on board her were deliberately manoeuvring to strike the English ship. But Saint Leger had already made his plans, and when presently the space between the two craft had narrowed until only a few fathoms separated them, and still there was no sign of the Spanish ship giving way, the young man put a whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast, whereupon the helm of the *Nonsuch* was put hard up, and as she bore broad away the whole of her starboard broadside was poured into the approaching ship, within biscuit-toss, and the discharge was instantly followed by a dreadful outcry aboard her, mingled with the sound of rending timbers; and as the two ships drove close past each other it was seen that her foremast had been shot away. Then, to the amazement of all on board the English ship, an order in Spanish was shouted, and the next instant a straggling but heavy musketry fire was opened upon the former from the decks of the latter, in the midst of which George hailed the Spaniard with:

"*Hola!* there. How dare you, señor, quit your anchorage without orders, and attempt to leave the harbour? Return at once, or I swear to you that I will sink you forthwith. If you are not round and heading for the anchorage by the time that I am again alongside you, I will give you another broadside. And—arrest the man, whoever he is, who issued the order to you to open fire upon us, for somebody will have to be punished for that outrage."

Whether or not the Spaniards were able to assimilate the whole of his instructions, George could not tell, for the two ships were fast driving apart; but when at length the *Nonsuch* was hove about and once more approached the Spaniard's weather quarter, with guns run out, a figure leaped up on the plate ship's taffrail, frantically waving a lighted lantern, and as he did so, he hailed:

"Do not fire upon us again, señor, for the love of God! We are busily engaged in clearing away the wreck of our foremast, and as soon as that is done and the ship is once more under command, I give you my word, upon the honour of a Spaniard, that we will return to the anchorage."

"The honour of a Spaniard!" retorted George, contemptuously. "How much is that worth, after the specimen of it which you have given me this night? However, you cannot possibly escape, so I will spare you for the present. Have you arrested the man who ordered your musketeers to fire upon us?"

"No, señor," was the answer. "Do you wish him to be put under arrest?"

"That was part of my order when I just now hailed you," retorted George. "But," he continued, "possibly you did not hear me; wherefore I repeat the order now."

"It shall be done," replied the stranger. "And, señor," he continued, "although the evidence against us be strong, I beg you not to think that all Spaniards are liars and faithless. There are some—of whom I am one—who know how to keep faith as well as an Englishman; and I will keep faith with you."

"See that you do so, señor," retorted George, as the ships again drew apart. "It will be better for you and those with you."

It was at this moment that the weather suddenly cleared, the clouds drove away to leeward, and the stars shone forth with that mellow lustre and brilliancy which renders a starlit night in the tropics so inexpressibly beautiful; in an instant the intense darkness which had hitherto enveloped the scene was rolled away like a curtain, and objects which a moment before had been invisible were now seen with comparatively perfect distinctness, the several ships which comprised the plate fleet—the whole of which were by this time under way—and even the wharves and houses of the town gleaming faintly and ghostly against the darker background of the country beyond and the blue-black of the star-spangled heavens. And now, too, lights suddenly began to appear in the two batteries which guarded the town. A few seconds later, as the *Nonsuch* was steering to intercept and order back to her anchorage the second of the escaping plate ships, first one and then the other of those same batteries opened fire, and that their ordnance was levelled against the English ship immediately afterward became apparent from the fact that several heavy shot came hurtling immediately overhead, one or two of which passed through the *Nonsuch's* canvas, but fortunately without inflicting any more serious damage.

"Spanish treachery again!" growled George to Basset, who was now standing on the poop beside him. "It would appear that the scoundrels know not what keeping faith means. I felt fully convinced that by securing possession of a dozen of the most important citizens as hostages, we should effectually protect ourselves from all possibility of attack; but it is clear that there is somebody ashore there who cares not what happens to the hostages, if he can only find a chance to strike at us a treacherous blow. Now, then, to deal with this rascal," indicating the approaching plate ship. "Severe measures are best in such cases as this, and if we deal with this fellow sharply, perhaps the others will take the hint, and return to the anchorage without waiting to be shot at. Starboard your helm, Mr Dyer"—to the pilot; "we will pass under this fellow's stern, shaving him as closely as may be and pouring a raking broadside into him as we pass; and if that does not make him bear up, we will follow him and give him another. Now, gunners of the starboard battery, stand by your ordnance, and discharge when we are square athwart this big ship's stern."

The two craft were by this time within hailing distance of each other, but perfect silence was maintained on board both until the *Nonsuch*, by hauling her wind to pass under the plate ship's stern, exposed practically the whole of her deck to those aboard the bigger ship, when an order suddenly rang out, and the whole of the Spaniard's bulwark instantly flashed into a hundred points of flame as a party of musketeers aboard her discharged their weapons at close range. At such an exceedingly short distance it was inevitable that a certain number of casualties should occur, and George, with rage in his heart, saw several figures collapse and fall upon the deck of his own ship, Dyer's among them, while a bullet rang sharply upon his own steel headpiece, causing him to stagger slightly.

"The villains!" he muttered savagely; "they shall pay dearly for this. Hold your fire, men; do not discharge your



ordnance until we are square athwart his stern. Then let him have it and rake him fore and aft!"

Some five seconds later, the starboard broadside of the *Nonsuch's* ordnance, great and small, crashed out, one piece after another in rapid succession; and mingled with the roar of the guns there arose a dreadful chorus of shrieks and yells from the Spaniard's crowded decks. At the same instant the shore batteries renewed their fire, and so eager, apparently, were the artillerymen to destroy the English ship that they seemed to care little though their own countrymen shared her destruction, for at least half the shot fell on board the ship that had just sustained such a punishing broadside from the English, which still further added to the confusion on board her. And when, a moment later, the *Nonsuch* hove in stays, with the evident intention of repeating the dose with her larboard broadside, the mere threat proved quite enough, for the big craft hurriedly put up her helm and bore away again for the anchorage, with her scuppers streaming blood. The lesson seemed to have sufficed for the rest also; for, one after the other, as they saw the *Nonsuch* heading toward them, they, too, bore up and headed back toward the anchorage, while the artillerymen manning the batteries plumped shot into them indiscriminately, apparently unable to distinguish between friend and foe, so that, as they ran in again, those who had hitherto escaped the broadsides of the Englishmen received a pretty severe castigation from their friends ashore. At length, however, the whole fleet got back to the anchorage, well peppered on the one hand by their own batteries, and, on the other, receiving an occasional reminder from the *Nonsuch*, until they were all once more at anchor, when the Englishmen, as they passed to their own sheltered berth, stood close inshore and poured a couple of broadsides into the nearest battery, so well directed and with such deadly effect that it was effectually silenced, while, as for the other, she soon passed beyond the range of its guns and dropped her anchor as near to the spot which she had previously occupied as could be determined by the elusive light of the stars.

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## Chapter Eleven.

### How they emptied the strong rooms of the twelve plate ships.

The first thing done aboard the *Nonsuch*, as soon as she and the other ships had come to an anchor, was to ascertain the amount of loss and damage attendant upon this fresh display of Spanish treachery, and this proved, upon examination, to be very much less than might reasonably have been expected. The most serious were the casualties resulting from musketry fire, but even these were by no means considerable, the loss amounting only to three killed and seven wounded—two of the latter, however, being reported by Chichester as serious cases. The ship herself had escaped damage in a manner that was little short of miraculous, a few shots through her canvas and two in her hull covering the full extent of her injuries; but this was probably due to ignorance on the part of the artillerymen in the batteries, who, unused to distinguishing one ship from another, had failed to identify the *Nonsuch* in the uncertain starlight, and had expended most of their ammunition upon their friends, with disastrous results to the latter, as subsequently appeared.

Meanwhile, the hostages, startled out of a light and troubled sleep upon the first alarm that the plate ships were attempting to escape, had sat huddled together in the great state cabin throughout the succeeding hour and a half, quaking at every command which reached their ears from the deck above, quaking still more when the firing began, roundly denouncing and execrating the criminal folly of those, whoever they might be, who were responsible for this fresh breach of faith, and anxiously debating the question as to whether the young English Captain would hang the whole of them in reprisal, or whether he would spare a certain number, and if so, how many, and who. The alcalde had not returned to the ship after leaving her in company with the Captain and his armed guard on the previous day, having parted with George outside the Government building when the Englishmen set out to visit the Inquisition, which circumstance had been duly communicated to the hostages by Saint Leger upon his return; and some of his fellow townsmen now manifested a disposition to lay the blame for the affair upon his shoulders; the majority, however, were of the contrary opinion, and it was this opinion upon which they grounded the hope which ultimately arose that some of them at least might be spared. For, they argued, if he were not guilty, he would take immediate steps to discover who was, and having found the guilty party, would cause his prompt arrest, after which they might hope for his return to the ship to surrender the guilty one. But everything was most horribly uncertain; and the more they debated the matter the worse complexion did it assume; so that by the time that the ship was back at the anchorage and the anchor let go, they were all in a most pitiable state of distress and fright. And this state was in nowise relieved when, as day was on the point of breaking, George entered the cabin, and they noted the stern, set expression of his features.

He gazed slowly round at the quaking company for some moments in silence, and then said:

"Well, señores, you were yesterday convinced of the ability of your countrymen to keep faith with an honourable enemy, or I suppose you would not have consented to guarantee their fidelity with your lives. What think you of them now?"

"Ah, noble señor," exclaimed one of them—a certain Don Martin de Sylva—"be merciful, I pray you, and do not hastily wreak upon us, who are innocent, the vengeance so justly provoked by the act of another. This is not the treachery of a whole community, señor, believe me, but is the deed of some mad zealot—and, by all the Saints! I believe I can name him, too," he suddenly broke out, wheeling eagerly round upon his fellow hostages and excitedly addressing them. "What say you, señores; does not the whole complexion of this unforgivable outrage point your suspicions almost irresistibly toward one particular man? Are we to believe that our worthy alcalde is capable of imperilling the lives of his fellow townsmen, as ours have been imperilled this night, by an act of such base, wanton betrayal as all this amounts to? I say no, most emphatically; for, apart from every other consideration, what would he gain by it? No; this is the deed of a man anxious to curry favour at any cost with the Viceroy—who, we know, hates the English, and justly fears them, too, after his atrocious act of last year; and what man so anxious to win favour in that direction as—I say it with deliberation, señores—Don Manuel Reberia, the acting Commandant of the military forces? That, in my humble opinion, noble Capitan, is the man whom we have to thank for this latest outrage; and I

think—nay, I *hope*—that—Heavens! I wonder whether the alcalde will have the courage—or, rather, the *power*—to arrest him, Don Manuel having the soldiery at his back.”

“I had an interview with Don Manuel Rebiera, yesterday,” remarked George; “and I feel bound to admit that I observed a certain something in his manner which to some extent justifies your suspicion of him. But whoever may be the person responsible for last night’s—or, rather, this morning’s—proceedings, I most fervently hope, for your sakes, señores, that he will be speedily found and delivered into my hands; for I tell you that somebody will have to pay very dearly indeed for them. I shall do nothing rashly or hastily, señores—you may reassure yourselves upon that point—but an act of basest, foulest treachery has been perpetrated, and retribution must follow. If you can in any way, whether by suggestion or otherwise, assist me to lay my hands upon the culprit, or culprits, I strongly advise you to do so, for your own sakes; for, failing the actual guilty parties, *you*, señores, are the persons who will have to pay the penalty.” And, so saying, George passed on and into his own cabin, leaving the hostages almost as profoundly perturbed as before.

Meanwhile, Basset, acting under Saint Leger’s instructions, had caused a boat to be lowered and manned by a strong crew, fully armed, and in her had proceeded to board the plate ships, one after the other, with the view of ascertaining who had been in command during the futile effort to take them to sea, also to arrest those persons, whoever they might be, and bring them aboard the *Nonsuch*. This task occupied fully two hours; so that it was drawing well on toward breakfast time when at length the boat returned, bringing with her seven men—the remainder having somehow contrived to effect their escape to the shore—who admitted having been in temporary command of the ships during the night. These men George questioned immediately upon their arrival; when the suspicion given expression to by one of the hostages an hour or two earlier, was fully confirmed; the prisoners asserting that their written orders—which they produced in confirmation of their story—had been given them on the previous afternoon by Don Manuel Rebiera, the acting Military Commandant of the town and the representative of the Spanish Government; those orders being to get the ships under way at a certain hour, with the twofold object of escaping to sea, if possible, and of enticing the English ship to follow them into the open, where she would be exposed to the fire of the batteries, when it was hoped that she would be destroyed, and the remnant of her crew captured. Upon receiving this information George at once sat down and wrote a letter to the alcalde, informing him of what had transpired, and demanding the immediate arrest and surrender of the acting Commandant, the penalty for non-compliance with the command before noon, being the bombardment and sack of the town. This letter he entrusted to one of the hostages—chosen by lot—who forthwith left the ship in a shore boat which had been called alongside, promising that he would leave no stone unturned to secure submission to the English Captain’s demands. Then all hands went to breakfast.

Meanwhile, with the strengthening of daylight it was discovered that the *Nonsuch*, upon returning to the roadstead after her pursuit of the plate ships, had brought up so close to the spot where she had slipped her buoyed anchor, that the cable could be recovered by the simple process of running out a warp to it; and this was therefore the first job undertaken when breakfast was over, the second anchor being at the same time weighed and secured; after which there was nothing to be done but to wait until noon—or the arrival of a reply from the alcalde.

It was, however, not necessary to wait for noon; for about half-past ten o’clock a boat was seen approaching the *Nonsuch* from the shore; and when she presently drew near enough to permit recognition of the faces of those in her it was seen that the alcalde was her solitary passenger; and very shortly afterwards she ranged up alongside the English ship, and Don Juan Alvarez climbed the side ladder in an evident state of profound trepidation. He brought momentous news, to the effect that it had indeed been Don Manuel Rebiera who had taken upon himself to arrange the whole affair of the preceding night; and that when at daylight he had discovered how completely his scheme for the destruction of the English ship had failed—and had also realised, it is to be presumed, all that his failure involved, the terrible retribution that the English would be certain to exact, and the whole responsibility for which must rest upon his shoulders—the unhappy man had retired to his private office in the Government building, and, after writing and signing a document acknowledging himself to be the sole culprit, had shot himself through the head. To this piece of news the alcalde added the further information that the soldiers, some eight hundred in number, infuriated at the suicide of their chief, and the terrible affair of the previous day at the Inquisition, for both of which occurrences they held the English equally responsible, were practically in a state of mutiny, and were parading the streets, fully armed, loudly announcing their intention to kill any Englishman who dared to leave the shelter of his ship and venture ashore. Further, it appeared that the citizens, about equally alarmed at the violence of feeling displayed by the soldiers, and the fear that the town would be bombarded in reprisal for the outrage perpetrated by Don Manuel, had taken refuge in the cathedral and the various churches, where, under the leadership of the priests, they were offering up especial prayers for protection and deliverance.

“Very well, señor alcalde,” said George, when that official had completed his report; “you have made the state of affairs ashore sufficiently clear for all practical purposes. Now, touching the matter of the indemnity which I have demanded, what has been done with regard to that?”

“Nothing—definite—so far—I regret to say,” answered the alcalde, haltingly. “Of course,” he continued, “I have discussed the matter with Don Manuel Rebiera, the late acting Commandant; but I found him exceedingly difficult and untractable to deal with. When I first broached the subject to him, I regret to say that he immediately fell into a most violent rage, and declared, with quite unnecessary vigour, that he would have nothing whatever to do with the payment of any indemnity, however small; and when I pointed out to him that the lives of twelve of our most important and valued citizens hung in the balance, and might very possibly be sacrificed unless he displayed a very much larger measure of pliability—well—I will not offend your ears, most illustrious Capitan, by repeating his exact words, but I may tell you they were to the effect that he would rather every hostage were hanged, and the town itself laid in ruins, than suffer the humiliation of being compelled to pay an indemnity for an action which he, personally, regarded as perfectly righteous and justifiable. On the whole, señor, I am inclined to think that it is just as well for all concerned that Don Manuel is dead; for I am convinced that, had he continued to live, he would have proved an insuperable bar to every kind of negotiation, and, quite possibly, have precipitated a further catastrophe. For he was a Government official, and was possessed, in a very marked degree, of all the arrogance, the tyrannical, overbearing

manner, the blind, intolerable pride, and the immeasurable contempt for everybody and everything not official, that so strongly characterises the representatives of Government in these territories. Yet, on the other hand, his death places me in a dilemma from which I can see no way of extricating myself; for the Commandant is so ill that it is impossible for me to discuss business with him; I dare not act upon my sole, unsupported authority; and if I have understood you aright, *illustrissimo*, you will not give the time necessary to communicate with the Viceroy. So what am I to do?"

"I quite recognise the difficulty of your position, Don Juan," answered George; "and perhaps the simplest way will be for us to act entirely upon our own initiative, and so relieve you of all responsibility in the matter. Therefore, if you will kindly excuse me, I will leave you for a little while, and will discuss the situation with my officers. And while I am absent, you will have an opportunity to talk matters over with these worthy gentlemen, your fellow-citizens, who are in the unfortunate position of being hostages for a good faith that has been wantonly broken. Perhaps when I return you may find yourselves able to make a proposal, or at least offer a suggestion."

Having said which, the young Englishman bowed to his involuntary guests, and went out on deck, where he invited Basset and Heard to accompany him to the poop for the purposes of a consultation. That same consultation proved to be but a very brief affair; for George opened it by clearly explaining to his fellow adventurers the distinctive features of the situation, as it then existed, and giving his own views as to the manner in which it might best be met; whereupon his companions at once agreed to his suggested course of procedure, daring though this was, and the conference, if such it might be called, broke up, having lasted less than a quarter of an hour. Then, while Basset and the purser resumed the duties upon which they had previously been engaged, Saint Leger returned to the state cabin to announce to the anxious alcalde and his companions the decision which had been arrived at.

"Well, señores," he remarked cheerfully, glancing round at the expectant faces so eagerly raised to his, as he entered the cabin, "I have discussed with my officers the difficulty which confronts us all, and we have resolved upon a course of action which I trust will be acceptable to you. We have come to the conclusion that it is not the inhabitants of San Juan who are responsible for the occurrences of last night; and therefore it would be unjust for us to punish them, through you, for what happened. Therefore if nothing further of an untoward character occurs during the stay of the *Nonsuch* in your harbour, your own lives are safe, and your town will be spared by us—." Here a sigh of profound relief floated round the cabin, accompanied by a little stir as the hostages' tense attitudes relaxed and they settled themselves into more comfortable positions. "But," continued George, "the fact remains that a daring and treacherous attempt to effect our destruction was made last night, as of course you are all fully aware; and that attempt must be very severely punished, and ample compensation exacted.

"Now, it is perfectly clear, from what your respected alcalde has told us, that the outrage—for I can call it nothing less—was instigated by, and carried out under the direction of, an official representative of the Spanish Government; therefore, since that official has placed himself beyond the reach of punishment, the Government of which he was a representative, and on behalf of which we are to assume he acted, must pay the penalty. Fortunately for you and us, who are the parties most intimately concerned, the means whereby your Government can be most severely punished, and an ample penalty paid, lie close to hand, in the plate ships at present in your harbour; and it is our intention to avail ourselves of that circumstance by confiscating the whole of the treasure now on board them; and I have accordingly issued orders that they are to be brought alongside this ship, one after another, and the treasure removed with all expedition from their strong rooms to our own. In this way your Government will be the only loser, your own lives and property will be spared; and we trust that the plan will consequently commend itself to you. The only feature of the plan which may perhaps be distasteful to any of you is that I shall feel myself compelled to keep Don Juan Alvarez, your worthy alcalde, as well as yourselves, a prisoner until the transfer has been effected; and I do this solely because he happens to be the only person among you who wields any authority, and it may possibly be necessary for him to exercise that authority from time to time, in order to restrain the crews of the various ships from causing trouble. Now, señores, what think you of my plan?"

For a few moments dead silence reigned in the cabin, the fact being that the Dons were literally smitten speechless by the paralysing enormity of the proposed insult and injury to the dignity of that Government which, in their eyes, was only a shade less sacred than the Church, and their first emotion was one of overwhelming indignation against those whose colossal insolence and audacity rendered them capable of such an overwhelmingly humiliating proposal. But the offence to their national pride was quickly swamped by considerations of their own personal safety, and as one man they soon came to the conclusion that anything—yes, *anything*, even the humiliation of their king, was better than the sacrifice of their own lives and the destruction of their own property which would be involved in a retaliatory bombardment and sack of the town. If the Government chose to leave San Juan de Ulua in so defenceless a condition as to render such an outrage possible, then let Government suffer the humiliation and the loss! Such were, in substance, the dominant thoughts in the minds of the alcalde and his fellow prisoners; and at length, perceiving that none of the others were willing to speak, one, Don Martin de Sylva, the oldest as well as the most prominent and important of the hostages, rose to his feet and said, slowly and impressively:

"Señor Capitan, you have asked for our opinion of your most astounding proposal; and I will give you mine, which I put forward as my own exclusively, and which I do not pretend to advance as in the slightest degree representative of those of my companions. In the first place, I must be permitted to remind you that, although one of the avowed purposes of your visit to our city is to avenge and exact compensation for an attack upon your countrymen in our harbour, last year, which we all deplore and deprecate, you have as yet offered us no proof of your authority for such action, which, for all that we know, may have been taken actually without the knowledge of those who are legitimately entitled to regard themselves as the injured parties; therefore I think you must acknowledge that it is not surprising if we and our Government have been slow to recognise your claims. You may have been duly accredited by Her Majesty the Queen of England to exact the reparation which you demand; but, if so, I think you ought to have submitted your credentials when you made your claim, and that claim, I venture to suggest, should have been made in proper diplomatic form, instead of being, as it was, a mere threat. But if you hold no credentials from Her Majesty, and your authority is self-imposed, the conduct of which I complain is quite comprehensible, and although it may be in the highest degree irregular I am prepared to admit that it is not altogether unjustifiable, since I understand that

your own brother was, and indeed still is, a sufferer from the attack upon Admiral Hawkins' fleet. Your claim on his behalf I am willing to admit is not outrageously unreasonable, and I deeply regret that it was not immediately *met* and promptly discharged. The most unfortunate feature of the whole affair is of course the action which that misguided and over-zealous fool, Rebera, took during the early hours of this morning. That action completely disarms us and perhaps—I only say *perhaps*—justifies you, in a measure, in the stupendous demand which you are now making. For my own part, I have no hesitation in expressing the opinion that, as reparation only, your demands are excessive and far beyond all reasonable bounds. But if they are intended—as I gather they are—to be regarded also as a wholesome chastisement of our Government for an act of treachery on the part of one of its officials, then I have nothing further to say. You have the power to exact what terms you please, and if you choose to exercise that power, we have not the means to prevent you. For myself, all I can say is that I am very grateful to you that you have been so fair-minded as to admit the innocence of myself and my fellow hostages in connection with an affair over which we have had no control, yet for which you might, had you so chosen, have exacted our lives as a penalty." Having thus delivered himself, the old Don bowed gravely and resumed his seat.

"Thank you, Don Martin," answered George, good-humouredly. "I asked for an opinion, and you have given me yours, frankly and fearlessly; and I imagine, from the expression of approval which I seem to read upon your compatriots' faces, that their opinion coincides with your own pretty closely. Well, be it so; naturally, you and I regard this whole matter from two very different points of view. Now, what says your worthy alcalde? Is he willing to exercise his authority over the crews of the ships, if necessary, in order to avert further trouble and complications?"

The alcalde rose to his feet and bowing, with the native grace of the high-bred Spaniard, to George, replied:

"Assuredly I will, señor; for the power is in your hands, and you can enforce obedience if you see fit. And anything will be preferable to the useless slaughter which I foresee would inevitably result from ineffective and ill-advised action on the part of our mariners. To avoid that deplorable waste of life, therefore, I am prepared to intervene, should the necessity unhappily arise. At the same time, señor, I feel it due to myself to join my protest to that of my friend, Don Martin de Sylva, and, I think I may add, the rest of us here present, against what I cannot avoid regarding as the tremendously excessive penalty which you are about to impose in retaliation for the ill-judged action of one man, who has already paid with his life for his mistake." And therewith Don Juan resumed his seat, to the accompaniment of approving murmurs from his companions.

"Very well, then," said George, composedly; "that matter is also settled. And now, señor, I think it will be advisable that you should accompany me out on deck, and hold yourself ready to act, if required; for, from the sounds which reach me, it would seem that the first of your ships is being hauled alongside; and your intervention may therefore be needed at any moment."

As it happened, however, no intervention on the part of the alcalde was required; possibly his presence on the poop of the *Nonsuch* beside George, where he could be distinctly seen by everybody, may have exercised a wholesome restraint upon the Spanish crew; or the sight of the entire crew of the English ship, mustered on deck, armed to the teeth, the gunners standing by their ordnance with lighted matches, may have had something to do with it; be that as it may, the Spanish seamen offered no resistance when it became apparent that the English were about to transfer the treasure from the plate ships' strong rooms to their own; nay more, they even assisted in the transfer, when commanded to do so, although it must be confessed that they worked with sullen countenances, and many muttered threats and grumblings.

There were twelve plate ships in the harbour, of which number ten were fully loaded; but when it came to inspecting the strong rooms of these ships it was found that all twelve of them had received their full complement of treasure, consisting of silver bars, gold bricks—each separately sewn up in its casing of hide, as transported from the mines—and one large chest of pearls, the proceeds of the whole previous year's fishing in the adjacent waters. The gold and silver also represented a whole year's produce of the mines; and so enormous was the quantity of the precious metals that its transfer to the *Nonsuch* occupied six entire days; while, when at length the task was completed, the *Nonsuch*, stout ship as she was, floated the deeper by a good five strakes!

The work was completed on a certain day, about an hour after sunset; and at the very urgent request of the alcalde and his friends the hostages, George arranged to leave the port forthwith; for although no actual demonstration had been made against the ship, news had come off from the shore, from time to time, to the effect that the whole town was seething with indignation at the sight of such an enormous amount of treasure being seized by the hated English, while the soldiery were going about the streets breathing fire and slaughter and doing their utmost to incite the town folk to unite with them in a determined effort to recapture the treasure and annihilate the English pirates; while, as the time went on, it became perfectly evident that only the fear of bombardment restrained the civilians from entertaining the proposal; and, even so, the alcalde was in a perfect agony of fear lest, despite all the efforts of his friends ashore, some rash act on the part of the soldiery and the rougher element among the civilians, should yet precipitate a catastrophe. Therefore, no sooner was the last gold brick transferred than the alcalde and his fellow prisoners overwhelmed George with most urgent solicitations that, having now accomplished all he had planned, he would proceed to sea forthwith; which, there being no reason to the contrary, the young captain willingly consented to do. Accordingly, the canvas was loosed, the anchor hove up to the bows; and, the alcalde and his friends having been transferred to the ship alongside, the fasts were cast off, the topsails sheeted home, and under the impulse of a gentle off-shore breeze the *Nonsuch* stood out of the harbour of San Juan de Ulua, after a sojourn of a full week pregnant with events of great and far-reaching importance. It afterwards transpired that the English had only got away from the port by the bare skin of their teeth; for within twenty-four hours of their departure the belated convoy arrived with the plate ships from Cartagena and Nombre de Dios; and when the Spanish Admiral was made acquainted with the details of George's daring raid—which was within an hour of his arrival—he was so convulsed with rage that in the height of his passion he ordered the entire convoy to weigh and put to sea again—leaving the newly-arrived plate ships to take care of themselves and their precious cargoes as best they might—with instructions to the captains that they were on no account to return without the English ship. The result of this mad order was that the convoy was absent for three full weeks, during which George, had he only known it, might have returned and

filled the *Nonsuch* with treasure until she would hold no more. But while the Spanish captains were straining their ships to pieces by threshing to the northward under a heavy press of sail, under the conviction that the English were homeward bound and were heading north to avail themselves of the assistance of the Gulf Stream, the heavily-laden *Nonsuch* was steadily working to windward across the Gulf of Campeche, making for the northern coast of Yucatan, on her way back to the little desert island off the southern coast of Jamaica, where the adventurers had buried their first haul of treasure.

For now that the *Nonsuch* was loaded down with so fabulously rich a freight, the first consideration of its new owners was to temporarily deposit it in some place of safety while they pursued their quest of the missing Hubert Saint Leger, lest haply misfortune should befall them and, losing their ship, they should lose their treasure also. And now it was that George had his eyes opened, for the first time, to one at least of the disadvantages of so stupendous a stroke of good fortune as had been his and his companions'. For their haul of treasure had been so enormous that the men had got tired of handling it before its transfer had been completed; nay more, they were actually *satisfied* with the amount of their wealth; and when George first announced his intention of burying it with the rest, prior to pursuing his search for his lost brother, there were those among his crew who loudly protested that they were now rich enough to return at once to England with what they had; that it would simply be a tempting of Providence to pursue the adventure further, and that, for their part, they had had quite enough of the Indies. But Saint Leger speedily quelled these murmurs by mustering the crew and reading to them the Articles of Agreement which all had signed, and which clearly set forth the objects with which the voyage had been undertaken, among which was distinctly specified the finding and deliverance of Mr Hubert Saint Leger. And having read these Articles, George proceeded to inform the crew of his determination to hold all hands to their bargain, reminded them of the pains and penalties provided by way of punishment for breaches, or even attempted breaches, of any Article of the covenant, and wound up by declaring that, rather than abandon his search for his brother, he would maroon the malcontents and leave them to find their way back home as best they could. And, as the malcontents proved after all to be but a small proportion of the crew, this threat quietened them, at least for the time being, and no further murmurs were heard.

On the morning of the ninth day after their departure from the harbour of San Juan de Ulua the adventurers sighted Cape Catoche, the most northerly point of the Peninsula of Yucatan, broad on the lee bow, tacked two hours later and made a stretch off the land until sunset, when they tacked again to the southward; and on the following day at noon their reckoning showed that they had accomplished their passage through the Strait of Yucatan and were once more in the Caribbean Sea. Eight days later the treasure island was sighted from aloft at sunrise; and by noon the *Nonsuch* with her cargo of treasure was safely at anchor under the lee of the island, and as close to the beach as it was prudent to take her. As soon as the canvas was furled and everything made snug aloft, all hands were piped to dinner; and at the conclusion of the meal two boats were lowered and manned, their crews well provided with mattocks, shovels, and other implements for digging, and were dispatched to the shore under the command of Dyer, who had by this time sufficiently recovered from his hurts to be able to sit in a chair and supervise the operations of the working party. And while these were busily engaged in the excavation of a pit capacious enough to receive the enormous amount of treasure in the hold of the *Nonsuch*, George with the remainder of the crew was as busily employed in getting the treasure up on deck in readiness for its transfer to the shore, and making such preparations as they deemed necessary for its adequate protection.

The particular part of the treasure about which Saint Leger was most anxious was the chest of pearls. He had not the most remote idea as to its value, but he knew that it must be almost fabulous; and he knew also how easily the delicate gems might be injured by damp penetrating to them from the surrounding earth; he therefore took the most elaborate precautions for their protection, those precautions being initiated immediately after the departure of the ship from San Juan. His first step was to have the junction of the lid with the box carefully and effectively caulked with cotton; and when this was done to his satisfaction he caused the exterior of the box to be painted several coats of thick paint, with the object of rendering the wood damp-proof. But, not content with this, he further caused the sailmaker to make two canvas coats to fit tightly over the chest, one coat over the other, and each coat securely fastened by a lacing. Then, when the paint on the chest itself was quite dry, the first canvas coat was slipped on, carefully laced, and then painted four coats, each coat of paint being allowed to dry before the next was applied. Then the second canvas coat was put on, the reverse way of the first, and secured. This was then coated several times with Stockholm tar, to preserve it from decay; and finally, when the last coat of tar was quite dry, the exterior was thickly coated with boiling pitch, as a culminating precaution, after which George decided that he had done everything possible for the preservation of the pearls and that they must now be left to take their chance.

It took the crew a full fortnight to transfer to the shore, bury, and cover up the treasure in such a manner as effectually to obliterate all traces of their operations; and on the morning of the fifteenth day after their arrival they hove up the anchor and made sail southward for Nombre de Dios, where George hoped to obtain some clue to the whereabouts of his brother Hubert.

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## Chapter Twelve.

### How they lost two men, and encountered a hurricane.

It was with a feeling of deep, indeed, almost perfect, satisfaction that George Saint Leger stood upon the poop of his vessel that day, and watched the tops of the coconut trees on "Treasure Island," as the men had come to name the place, gradually sink beneath the northern horizon; for not only had he insured the financial success of the expedition—so far as human effort could insure it—by gaining possession of an enormous amount of treasure, but he had placed that treasure beyond the possibility of loss by the chances of battle and shipwreck at least until the time should arrive to shape a course for home. Also, having accomplished these things, he was now absolutely free to prosecute that object which, in his eyes at least, had been the most important one connected with the voyage, namely, the search for and deliverance of his brother Hubert. There was also one other reason why the young captain

rejoiced to find himself once more out of sight of land, and that was the state of the weather. Shortly after sunset on the previous day he, in common with others of the ship's company, had noticed a gradual lessening of the strength of the trade-wind, but everybody had then been too busy to do more than just casually comment upon it; moreover the decline had at first been no greater than had been before observed upon more than one occasion. But the lessening process had continued very gradually all through the night and was still continuing, to such an extent indeed that by the time that the last signs of the island's whereabouts had vanished, the speed of the ship had sunk to a bare four knots, and that, too, with the wind broad abeam. It was not, however, the mere softening of the trade-wind that caused George to congratulate himself upon having secured an offing; it was the aspect of the sky, which was beginning to awake within him—and Dyer, too, for that matter—a certain feeling of uneasiness. For the *Nonsuch* was now within the limits of the hurricane area, the hurricane season had arrived—as Hawkins and Drake had learned to their cost just a year earlier, when, not very far from the spot where the *Nonsuch* then floated, their fleet had been caught in and all but destroyed by two of those devastating storms that, for three months of the year, sweep, raging, over the face of the Caribbean, leaving death and destruction in their wake—and there were indications that a change of weather was impending. The rainy season had long set in, and skies overcast by great masses of slate-blue cloud surcharged with rain and electricity were no new thing to the *Nonsuch's* crew, but the aspect of the sky on this particular day was of an altogether different character. It had begun with a paling of the brilliant azure, and had been so gradual that it was quite impossible to say when it had begun; the only thing certain was that a change was taking place and that a film of thin, transparent vapour was overspreading the entire sky and gradually reducing the sun in its midst to a shapeless blotch of dull yellow, while the wind continued steadily to decrease in strength. Two hours before the time of sunset the great luminary had become so completely obscured that all trace of him was lost; yet nothing in the shape of a cloud was to be seen, nothing but the veil of colourless vapour which obscured the sky, yet left the whole expanse of ocean almost unnaturally clear from one horizon to the other; and all the time the wind was falling, so that when at length the night suddenly closed down about the ship and she became enveloped in a darkness that might almost be felt, she had no more than bare steerage way; while by eight o'clock in the evening even this was lost, and the *Nonsuch* lay breathlessly becalmed and slowly swinging with the low heave of the swell, with her head first this way and then that. And with the cessation of the wind, the heat, which had all day been stifling, became so intolerable that the idle crew could do nothing but lie about the decks, gasping, for to go below was altogether out of the question.

Thus matters continued until close upon midnight, when a sudden flicker of sheet-lightning lit up the scene for perhaps a couple of seconds, revealing a sky packed with clouds of so threatening and portentous an aspect that Gorge, suddenly smitten with the apprehension that he had already delayed too long, gave the order for the fore and main topsails to be close-reefed and all other canvas to be furled with the utmost expedition possible, and the men, with much grumbling, crept out from their secluded corners and slowly proceeded to drag their relaxed and sweating bodies up the rigging. To shorten sail in such opaque darkness as then enveloped the ship was a lengthy task, and it was nearly one o'clock in the morning before that task was completed and the exhausted men were once more down on deck.

It was about half an hour later that there came to the crew of the *Nonsuch* the first premonition of a happening so extraordinary and so gruesome that the historian hesitates to record it, yet, after all, the story but adds one more to the already innumerable confirmations of the statement that "truth is stranger than fiction."

The men had distributed themselves here and there about the main deck, after searching with some care for such spots as were favoured with a light draught of wind set up by the slow roll of the ship upon the oil-smooth swell, and had disposed themselves to court sleep, if peradventure it would visit them and so bring relief from the heat and closeness of the suffocating night, while the young captain and Dyer, the pilot, occupied chairs on the poop, where they sat patiently watching for what might next happen—but it is safe to say, never dreaming of what that happening was to be, for their thoughts went not a step beyond the matter of weather.

The night was still intensely dark, so dark indeed that the feeble glimmer of the low-turned lamp in the main cabin, shining through the skylight and faintly irradiating the deck planks in its immediate vicinity was almost irritatingly dazzling, since it effectually blinded the sight to everything outside the irradiated area, and at length George rose to his feet with the intention of calling an order to have the skylight masked by a tarpaulin, when, as he stood upright and his head rose above the level of the bulwark rail, a faint whiff of a strange but peculiarly disgusting and offensive odour assailed his nostrils.

"Phew!" he ejaculated, forgetting all about the tarpaulin in the sensation of wonder evoked by the strangeness of the effluvium—"what in the world doth this mean? Dost catch it, Dyer?"

"Catch what?" demanded Dyer, also rising to his feet. "Phew!" he continued, as the smell struck his nostrils—"Catch it? That do I, with a murrain on it! Now, what doth this portend? There's no land nearer to us than our treasure island, and it cometh not thence, I dare swear, the smell's too strong for that; indeed I'd say that it cometh from close alongside—and maybe it doth, too; the smell's not unlike to stinking fish, yet there be something else to it beside. And it 'tis a dead fish, cap'n, then all I can say is that it's a mighty big one. Maybe 'tis a dead whale, yet I don't exactly think it. I've passed to leeward of a dead whale, wi' a cloud o' gulls and what not feedin' upon un, and the smell was different from this; just so strong, but different, and if my memory sarves me—even wuss. And if 'twas a whale, the gulls'd be swarmin' about un, fillin' the air wi' their cries, but I don't hear a sound. And, as to seein'—well, I wish 'twould come on to lighten a bit, then us might—"

"Aft there!" came a hail at this moment from the fore deck. "Do 'e happen to smell anything strange in the air, sir?"

"Ay, ay, we do," answered George; "the odour is strong enough, goodness knows. Who is it who is hailing?"

"Drew, the bo's'un, sir," came the answer, with a sharpness in it which effectually prevented its recognition by the two officers upon the poop. There was a note of alarm in the voice, and it was apparent that the men who had been endeavouring to sleep had risen to their feet and were excitedly discussing the phenomenon, for a low murmur of

many voices came floating aft from the fore-castle.

"Light a lantern, Drew," ordered George, "bend it on to a rope's end, and sling it overside. Maybe the light will show us something."

"Ay, ay, sir," floated back the answer, with that faint, elusive suggestion of sadness in its tone which seems to characterise the human voice when heard in the midst of the lonely ocean on a night of darkness and calm. There followed a slight scuffling of feet, another subdued murmur of voices, a pause of a few moments, then the sharp clink of flint and steel, a tiny spark of light, and finally the mellow glow of a ship's lighted lantern.

"Sling it over the bows, to start with," ordered George, "and then, if you can see nothing, walk slowly aft with it."

Another "Ay, ay," was quickly followed by the disappearance of the lantern over the fore extremity of the topgallant fore-castle, and then in the faint upward sheen from the lamp the dimly illuminated outline of the boatswain's face and form appeared, his outstretched right hand grasping the line to which the lantern was attached, while his left held the spare coil. His eyeballs gleamed as his gaze went out searching to its utmost confines the small space of illuminated water, apparently without result, for he presently began to move slowly aft, pausing for a short space of time in the foot of the fore-rigging, outside which he passed. Then, as he paused and the light grew steady, the two men on the poop caught wavering glimpses of a long line of very faintly lighted figures leaning over the larboard rail, from the after extremity of the fore-castle to the fore end of the poop, all eagerly scanning the gleaming, oil-like surface of the water, while here and there one pointed as though he believed he saw something. But although both George and Dyer were straining their eyesight to the utmost they could find nothing to reward their search, nay, even although at that moment a flicker of sheet-lightning gleamed for an instant along the north-western horizon. But the ship was at that moment swung with her head to the south-west, consequently the lightning was on the wrong side of her to afford any assistance. Moreover, it was no sooner come than it was gone again, yet not so soon but that George, and perhaps half a dozen others, raising their heads at the momentary illumination of the sky, saw, suspended overhead, an enormous mass of black, impending cloud, with jagged, ragged edges so wonderfully suggesting rent and tottering rocks about to fall upon and crush the ship and all in her, that quite involuntarily he uttered a low cry and cringed as though to escape an expected blow. And at that precise moment, as the young captain cowered and crouched, he felt a slight movement in the stagnant air about him, very much as though a great wing had swept immediately over his head so close that it had all but touched him, indeed he believed that it—whatever it might have been—*had* actually touched him, for unless his imagination had begun to play tricks with him he could have sworn that he felt the cap on his head move as though it had been grazed by some passing object.

"What was that?" he gasped, starting back from the rail over which he had been leaning, and flinging up his hand to his head. "Dyer, did you see or feel anything?"

"I saw the sky for a second, if that's what you mean; and I don't at all like the look o't; I've never see'd a sky quite like that afore—" answered Dyer.

"No, neither have I," interrupted George; "and I like the look of it as little as yourself. I believe it means that a hurricane is brewing. But I was not referring to the sky. At the moment when that gleam of lightning came I fancied that I felt something sweep through the air just above my head, and—"

"Hush! hark! what be that?" interrupted Dyer in his turn, placing a restraining hand on George's arm as he spoke, and in the silence that ensued there came to their ears from behind them a low, intermittent, grating sound, like—like what? Well, as much like some rough substance being slowly dragged over the poop rail, immediately behind them, as anything to which they could compare it.

"Who be you, and what be 'e doin' there?" demanded Dyer, dashing across the deck. But he was just too late, for a moment before he reached the rail the sound ceased, and he found nothing. But the horrible odour—something between putrid fish and decaying seaweed—was stronger than ever.

"You, bo's'un, haul up thicky lantern and bring un along here, quick," yelled Dyer. "Whatever 'tis that's raising this here smell, 'tis alongside the ship, and 'tis *alive*! And come up here, half a dozen o' you men down there in the waist—and bring axes wi' ye."

The boatswain quickly hauled up his lantern, and, accompanied by some ten or a dozen of the bolder spirits among the crew—the latter having hastily armed themselves with axes and pikes from the racks—hurried up to the poop, and a few moments later George and Dyer were curiously examining with the aid of the lantern's feeble light certain fresh excoriations on the poop rail which looked as though they might have been produced by a large and very coarse rasp forcibly drawn over it, while the men with pikes and axes crowded close up behind them, peering eagerly over their shoulders. They were still thus engaged when there suddenly flashed up over the rail a long slim, snake-like object, the precise nature of which it was impossible to determine in the intense darkness only faintly dissipated by the inefficient light of the lantern, and while all hands stood gaping dazedly at it the thing curled in over the rail, lightly touched the boatswain upon the chest, and instantly with a lightning-like movement coiled itself tightly about his body, encircling his arms and shoulders.

The man gave vent to a yell of dismay as he felt the coil of the horrible thing tighten round him, and the next instant screamed, in a voice hoarse and sharpened by terror:

"He've a-got me! He've a-got me and 's dragging of me overside! Hold on to me, dear souls, and don't let mun take me. Oh! I be goin'—he'm squeezin' the very life out o' me—save me, shipmates, save—"

*Crunch!* George had snatched an axe out of the hand of one of the paralysed seamen near him and, exerting all his strength, had brought it down upon the writhing, straining thing where it crossed the stout timber rail of the poop, with the result that the keen blade had completely severed the thing, and the boatswain, with some eight or nine feet

of the creature still clinging to his body, and the three men who had seized him in response to his terrified cries, went reeling backward from the rail and fell together in a heap upon the deck, taking the lantern with them, which was smashed and extinguished by the fall. At the same moment a terrific commotion arose in the water alongside, George received a violent blow which swept him off his feet and flung him heavily to the deck, and two men shrieked out the startling news that the thing—whatever it was—had got them and was dragging them overside, while confusion reigned supreme, not only on the poop, where a general stampede ensued, but also down on the main deck, where men were hastily arming themselves in defence from—they knew not what. And the sickening odour which had first announced the presence of the creature arose with redoubled strength, pervading the ship from end to end.

For perhaps five or six minutes the confusion and panic aboard the *Nonsuch* was of a character to defy description; men rushed, yelling, hither and thither in the darkness, colliding with each other and screaming under the impression that the convulsive embrace of their shipmates was the encircling grip of the unknown monster, heavy blows resounded here and there upon the deck, as though a giant cable was threshing the planking, causing the ship to quiver from stem to stern, the two men actually caught in the coils of the creature were shrieking horribly as they clung with tenacious grip to the rail over which they were being inexorably dragged; and over all rose the voice of Dyer calling for more lanterns.

Then suddenly there came a final despairing shriek from the two unfortunate men as they were dragged overboard, carrying with them a length of the stout rail to which they had been desperately clinging, the smashing blows upon the deck ceased, together with the turmoil in the water alongside, and presently four men came hesitatingly along the deck, carrying lighted lanterns. With still greater hesitation they at length permitted themselves to creep up the poop ladder, when the first object revealed by the light of their lanterns was the senseless body of the boatswain, his arms and shoulders still encircled by a snake-like object of light brownish-grey colour. The poor man had apparently swooned with terror, or, perhaps, the revulsion of feeling from it when he felt the sudden relaxation of the awful drag upon his body; and near him sat the captain upon the planks, bareheaded, his cap having fallen off, and somewhat ruefully rubbing his aching head where it had come into violent contact with the deck. He looked dazed, and, upon being questioned by Dyer, admitted that he believed he had been momentarily stunned by his fall. And all about him were wet sinuous marks upon the deck which sufficiently accounted for the furious banging sounds that had been heard, and which also conclusively demonstrated that the young captain had experienced an almost miraculous escape from the violent blows which had rained on the deck all round him.

The first thing done was to set about the restoration of the boatswain, and this task was undertaken by Chichester, the doctor, while Dyer, assisted by two of the men who had come aft with the lanterns, proceeded to free the senseless body from the curious serpent-like thing that still enwrapped it. And when this was presently done, not altogether without difficulty due to muscular contraction, Dyer stood for some moments thoughtfully and somewhat doubtfully regarding the object by the light of the lanterns. Then he bent down and began to handle it, turning it over on the deck and spanning its girth with his two hands. Finally he straightened himself up and, with the outer extremity grasped in his hand, turned to George and observed:

“Now I know what ’tis, though I’d never ha’ believed it if I hadn’t seen it wi’ these here two good eyes o’ mine. ’Tis the arm of a cuttle-fish; that’s what ’tis, and nothin’ else. Feel to the skin of un, cap’n, and look to the suckers o’ mun. I’ve see’d exactly the same sort o’ thing caught by the fishermen over on the French coast about Barfleur and Cherbourg, and I’ve heard that the things—squids, they calls ’em—actually attacks the boats sometimes and tries to pull the men out o’ them; but they was babies—infants in arms—to this here monster. I’ve knowed ’em wi’ arms so much as ten or twelve foot long, but the arm that this belonged to must ha’ measured all o’ forty foot, and maybe more. Bring along a couple of they lanterns, two of you, and let’s see if the brute be still alongside.”

The men received the order with visible trepidation, and were none too ready to execute it; but at length Dyer, who was certainly not lacking in courage, snatched a lantern from one of the men, threw the coils of the main topgallant brace off the pin, bent the lantern to the end of it, and climbing into the mizen rigging, lowered it over the side until it hung close to the surface of the water. But there was nothing to be seen; and it was now noticed that the exceedingly offensive odour which had recently pervaded the ship was no longer perceptible, apart from that which emanated from the severed tentacle, which was promptly hove overboard. Then the hands were mustered and the roll called, when it was found that two of the crew were missing, and there could no longer be a shadow of doubt that two of the ship’s company had actually been dragged off the deck and drowned, if not devoured by the creature!

But the crew of the *Nonsuch* were not allowed much time wherein to dwell upon this amazing tragedy, for scarcely had the boatswain been restored to his senses and conveyed below to his hammock to recover from the shock of his terrible adventure, when a low, weird, moaning sound suddenly became audible in the air all about the ship, the canvas of the close-reefed topsails, which had been flapping monotonously with the heave and roll of the ship, shivered and slatted violently for a moment, and a gust of hot wind from the north-west swept wailing over the ship and was gone. Then with equal suddenness a flash of vivid lightning rent the sky low down in the northern board, and presently, coincidentally with the muttered booming of distant thunder, another blast of hot wind struck the ship and swept away to the southward in the wake of the first. Then, almost before the sound of the second blast had died away in the distance, there again arose those strange moaning and wailing sounds in the air, seemingly right overhead, louder and more prolonged this time, and accompanied by queer shuddering rustlings of the topsails and momentary scufflings of conflicting draughts of air about the decks. These conflicting draughts finally resolved themselves into a series of fitful gusts from the northward, which happily lasted long enough to enable her crew to get the *Nonsuch’s* bows round, pointing to the southward, and then, with a screaming roar, the gale rushed down upon the ship, out from due north, and amid the yelling and piping of the wind, and the angry hiss of maddened waters suddenly scourged into white, luminous foam, with the spindrift flying over her in blinding, drenching showers, the ship gathered way and fled southward like a frightened thing.

The hurricane—for such it was—blew with appalling violence for exactly twelve hours, during which the *Nonsuch* scudded dead before it under close-reefed topsails, with the canvas straining and tugging until opinion became



divided as to whether the cloth would part company with the bolt-ropes, or whether, being new and strong, it would uproot the masts and drag them bodily out of the ship, especially when the crest of a sea swept roaring and foaming away ahead of her, and her way was checked as she settled back into the trough. Luckily, neither of these things happened, for if the canvas was new, so too was the good stout hemp rigging, which had, moreover, been set up afresh fore and aft, aloft and afloat, after the careening of the ship in that snug little Trinidad creek; consequently, although the masts bent like fishing-rods and groaned ominously from time to time in their partners, everything held, and the ship emerged from the unequal struggle not a penny the worse, although it must be admitted that her rigging had been stretched to such an extent that when at length it was relieved of the strain by the cessation of the gale, it hung loosely in bights that caused the worthy boatswain to shake his head and mutter to himself.

When at length the gale broke and the wind, veering as it fell, gradually worked round until it once more became the trade-wind, blowing out from about due east, the ship had accomplished the record run of her existence up to that date, Dyer's reckoning showing that the craft had averaged twelve knots throughout that mad, desperate race, and that it had swept them to within three hundred and twenty-five miles of their destination.

Late in the afternoon of the second day after the cessation of the gale, land was sighted ahead, and Dyer, having hurried aloft and carefully studied the features of the coast stretching athwart the ship's bows, at length announced with great satisfaction that Nombre de Dios lay straight ahead. Then George and he retired to the main cabin, where, in conjunction with the other responsible officers of the ship, they held a council, at which it was ultimately determined to take the ship into a small creek, some twenty miles to the eastward, which Drake had discovered when in those waters the year previously; there make all preparations for a boat attack upon the town during the night of the following day, capture Nombre, and then propose, as ransom, the surrender of Hubert Saint Leger, and any other Englishmen that might be in the hands of the Spaniards. The project was a sufficiently daring one, for Nombre de Dios had at that time the reputation of being the Treasure-house of the World, since to it was brought across the isthmus, from Panama, all the treasure of Peru, for shipment to Spain, therefore it would almost certainly be well guarded by soldiers. On the other hand, however, probabilities favoured the assumption—which, as we have already seen, was correct—that the plate ships would by this time have sailed from Nombre on their homeward voyage, in which case, since there would be no treasure to guard, the vigilance of the authorities might be somewhat relaxed, and a surprise might reasonably be expected to result in success. Also it was hoped that from the creek which the adventurers proposed to enter, the party might be able to get into touch with the terrible tribe of Cimarrones—or Maroons, as the English called them. This tribe originated in a number of African negroes who, some eighty years previously, had escaped from their Spanish masters and taken to the "high woods," or virgin forest, where, having taken to themselves wives from among the neighbouring Indians, they had in process of time grown into a formidable tribe, having one mission in life, and one only, namely, to harry the Spanish settlements generally, and to destroy, with every circumstance of the most refined and diabolical cruelty, every Spanish man, woman, or child who might be so unfortunate as to fall into their hands. Dyer knew something of these terrible blacks, having already met them in Drake's company; he knew that they were ever to be found lurking in the immediate vicinity of the half-dozen or so Spanish settlements established on the isthmus, and believed that it might be possible to obtain valuable information from them concerning the condition of Nombre, and perhaps even to secure their assistance in the contemplated attack upon the town. But when he suggested this last proposal, George and the others at once vetoed it from motives of policy and humanity, arguing that if the Cimarrones were permitted to gain access to the interior of the town, there was no knowing what barbarous excesses they might indulge in, which would necessitate the English making common cause with the Spaniards to protect the latter, and so convert the friendly feeling of the Cimarrones for the English into deadly enmity, which was a consummation to be carefully avoided.

The creek which Dyer proposed to enter proved to be so small, when at length the *Nonsuch* arrived in it, that, anchored as nearly as might be in its centre, there was only barely enough room to allow the vessel to swing clear of the banks when riding to a very short scope of cable. It was so late when the adventurers arrived in this miniature harbour that the fast-fading light showed but little of the surroundings save the fact that the place was completely land-locked, and was so hemmed-in on all sides by lofty trees of the virgin forest that, even moored as she was to a single anchor and a short scope of cable, the ship might ride there safely in practically all weathers, while the lofty trees effectually screened her presence both seaward and landward. The canvas was hastily furled, and then the crew went below to supper, with the understanding that after supper they would be permitted to turn in and take a long night's rest. But they were warned that, secluded and cut off as the place appeared to be, it was not without its dangers, and they must hold themselves prepared to turn out and fight for their lives at a moment's notice, while a strong and alert anchor watch must be maintained all through the night.

Not that there was much danger of an attack from the Spaniards, for close as the creek was to the port and town of Nombre, it was still sufficiently distant to render observation of the presence of the English ship more than doubtful. No, it was of the Cimarrones that Dyer was apprehensive, for if by any chance the presence of the ship in the creek should be prematurely discovered by these, an attack by them upon her would be more than likely to follow. For so deadly was the hatred borne by these savages for the Spaniards that, to find a few of the latter isolated and apparently at their mercy was quite sufficient inducement to the former to attack them. And so ignorant were the Cimarrones that they could scarcely discriminate between an Englishman and a Spaniard, and were equally ready to attack either—both being white—on the general principle that it was better that the innocent should suffer than that the guilty should escape. Yet Drake had already proved that they bore no hatred to white men, as such, for he had been in touch with them during the previous year, and had found them quite disposed to be friendly when once it had been satisfactorily demonstrated that the English were not Spaniards and were, like themselves, the enemies of the Dons. The great thing, of course, was to get into touch with the savages and to establish friendly relations with them before they should find and attack the English.

A sharp look-out was therefore maintained on board the *Nonsuch* throughout the hours of darkness, but the night passed uneventfully, except for the frequent recurrence of certain mysterious sounds emanating from the woods, which Dyer privately informed George were produced by monkeys or a prowling jaguar, and which, innocent enough in themselves, were yet sufficiently uncommon to keep the watch broad awake and on the alert; and at length the

dawn of a new day came stealing to them over the tree-tops, and, with it, the dissipation of their apprehensions.

As soon as it was light enough to see, the crew, refreshed by a whole night's rest, went to breakfast; immediately after which they turned to, under the supervision of Basset and the boatswain, to make every necessary preparation for the boat attack upon Nombre de Dios, while George and Dyer, armed to the teeth, were put ashore and went in quest of the Cimarrones.

The young captain caused himself and the pilot to be landed upon the western extremity of the small sandy beach which, fringed with coconut palms, half encircled the creek, and bidding their small boat's crew push off a spear's cast from the shore and there hold themselves in readiness to dash in to the rescue, if necessary, upon hearing the blast of the captain's whistle, proceeded to walk slowly round the cove, carefully examining the surface of the sand, as they went, in quest of footprints to serve as a guide, while Dyer at frequent intervals raised his hands trumpet-wise to his mouth and gave utterance to a peculiar, penetrating wailing cry which the pilot asserted was a call used by the Cimarrones to summon their comrades.

When they had traversed about two-thirds of the length of the beach certain marks were discovered in the fine, yielding sand, which, they decided, were prints of naked feet, several days old, and, carefully following these, they at length discovered a narrow but tolerably well defined footpath leading from the shore into the heart of the high woods. This they at once proceeded to follow, George leading the way with his drawn sword in his right hand and a musket in his left, while Dyer, close behind him, assiduously repeated his mysterious call at frequent intervals.

At a distance of but a few yards from the beach the sombre shadow of the woods was so deep that the explorers at first found it exceedingly difficult to trace the footpath in the subdued light, but in the course of a few minutes their eyes grew accustomed to the gloom and they were able to perceive something of their more immediate surroundings. They found themselves hemmed-in on every hand by giant tree trunks, dimly revealed in the green twilight which penetrated with difficulty the vast overarching masses of foliage, the space between the enormous trunks being choked with undergrowth of a thousand varied forms, conspicuous among which were immense ferns towering high above their heads, while above these, and drooping in many cases right down to the ground, was an inextricable maze and tangle of lianas, or "monkey rope," intertwined with which were countless festoons of flowering creepers, the mingled perfumes of which were almost overpowering in their pungency. Long pliant twigs thickly studded with needle-sharp thorns constantly protruded across the path, menacing their faces and tenaciously grappling their clothing, so that they had to halt at almost every other step to free themselves; and frequent quick rustlings among the long tangled herbage underfoot warned them of the presence of many hidden creeping things, some at least of which, as Dyer grimly suggested, were certain to be snakes or some other kind of venomous creature. The truth of this was very soon afterward rather unpleasantly demonstrated, for as George was battling with an exceptionally thick tangle of thorns which obstructed his way, he suddenly felt beneath his right foot a thick, cable-like something that yielded and squirmed beneath his tread, and like a flash there came a fierce hiss instantly followed by a sharp blow upon his boot. He at once realised that it was a snake upon which he was treading, and had enough presence of mind to throw his whole weight upon his right foot, thus pinning the reptile firmly to the ground. The blows upon his boot were repeated some half a dozen times before he was able to clear away the herbage about his feet, when he found that he was standing upon the body of a most ugly and repulsive-looking snake about five feet long, thick in the body, blunt tailed, of a dark olive green colour, variegated with irregular blotches of darker tint, and having the broad, flat, heart-shaped head that marked it as a venomous species. It was striking fiercely but rather ineffectually, because of its constrained position, at his boot, while its tail part was coiled tightly about his boot leg. A quick and lucky stroke of his sharp sword-blade whipped off the cruel head, and then, stooping down, George saw that his boot had been several times partially punctured by the long poison fangs. Fortunately for him he had, at Dyer's suggestion, donned a pair of long sea boots of thick leather which had become hardened by frequent washings of salt water, and thus the fangs had failed to penetrate, to which fact he undoubtedly owed his life.

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## Chapter Thirteen.

### How the Englishmen took Nombre de Dios.

For fully two miles the adventurers pursued their devious course through the tropical forest, sometimes groping their way cautiously through the deep green twilight, and anon almost blinded by a sudden glare of dazzling sunshine, as they emerged into an open space caused either by fire or a windfall, and all the time Dyer kept up the curious cry, at frequent intervals, which was the call of the Cimarrones. And all the time, too, they were accompanied by a constantly increasing company of monkeys of various kinds who, led no doubt by curiosity, went swinging and springing from branch to branch beside and above the pathway, exchanging strange cries which, Dyer averred, were remarks upon the personal appearance of the strangers, uttered in monkey language!

Nor were monkeys and snakes the only inmates of the forest, for they had scarcely progressed a quarter of a mile beyond the spot where the snake had been encountered when a great creature like a long-legged cat, but standing over thirty inches high at the shoulder, suddenly emerged from the tangled underwood and halted abruptly, staring at the approaching strangers for a few seconds before, with an angry snarl, it bounded out of sight down the path. It was not easy to detect its colour and markings in that dim light, but its shape stood out clear and sharply denned against the brilliant sunlight streaming down into a windfall just beyond, and Dyer pronounced it to be a jaguar. Then, a little farther on, they had just sighted the glint of water between the trees some distance away on their left front, when a heavy crashing was suddenly heard among the underbush, and a moment later a creature about the size of a half-grown calf was glimpsed trotting heavily towards the water. As in the case of the jaguar, its colour could not be distinguished, but its shape was very remarkable. Dyer compared it to a pig with exceptionally thick legs and a peculiar, elongated snout; and that was about as near as he could reasonably be expected to get to it. It subsequently became known to natural historians as the tapir.

It was about a quarter of an hour afterwards that an answering cry to Dyer's signal shout was first heard, and some five minutes later, as the two Englishmen emerged from the gloom of the forest and entered a natural clearing of about fifteen acres in extent, they were suddenly confronted by six big, stalwart blacks, who barred their further progress with threatening spears of most formidable appearance. These men seemed to be a cross between the African negro and the Indian of Central America, for they were somewhat lighter of colour and slighter of build than the negro, while their black hair hung down to their shoulders in crisp curls. They were naked, save for a skin apron girt about their loins; and by way of ornament they wore necklaces composed of the teeth and claws of animals and the beaks of birds strung upon thin strips of hide. They also all wore bits of bone thrust through the lobes of their ears.

The individual who appeared to be the leader of the party addressed the two white men in a somewhat thick, throaty tone of voice, but in language of which the Englishmen were quite ignorant, the only thing that was at all clear being that it was a question of some sort that he was propounding.

"Speak you to un, cap'n," said Dyer. "I don't understand their lingo, but I think most of 'em understands Spanish. Cap'n Drake could always make hisself understood."

The six blacks gazed intently at Dyer as he spoke, apparently striving to gather some conception of the meaning of his words, and George noticed that at the mention of Drake's name they all started, while two or three of them murmured to each other, "Drake—Drake—*El Draque?*" questioningly. He at once jumped to the conclusion that Drake's name was familiar to them, and promptly acted upon the assumption.

"Yes," he said in Spanish, "we are friends of *El Draque*. Do you remember him?"

"*Si, señor,*" answered the leader of the party eagerly, also in a mongrel kind of Spanish which George was able to comprehend without very much difficulty. "Yes, we remember *El Draque*, the great white chief and the enemy of our enemy the Spaniard. Is he here again?"

"No," answered George, "I regret to say that he is not; the Great White Queen needed his services, so he could not come. But I have come in his stead to punish the Spaniards for their treachery to him last year, and I want some information concerning Nombre de Dios. Can you give it me? You are Cimarrones, are you not?"

"*Si, señor, si,*" answered the black; "we are Cimarrones; and perhaps our chief may be able to tell you what you wish to know about Nombre. Will you come to our village? It lies yonder."

And, indeed, in the far corner of the clearing George could now distinguish a small village consisting of about thirty low huts huddled together in the bordering shadow of the next belt of high timber. The path from the wood zigzagged across the clearing, winding here to avoid an enormous stump, and there to pass round a fallen tree—for the Cimarrones were far too lazy to attempt what they regarded as the unnecessary labour of clearing away obstacles—but trending generally toward the conglomeration of huts in the far corner of the clearing.

The village of Lukabela—so named after its chief—did not favourably impress George Saint Leger, when the little party presently reached it. It was the young Englishman's first introduction to actual savagedom, and the filthy condition of the huts and their surroundings, the lean and hungry look of the pack of snarling village dogs which rushed out to meet them, red-eyed with semi-starvation and ferocity, and with bared fangs, ferocious as wild beasts and only restrained from attack by the presence of the native escort, and the overpowering reek of many mingled forms of dirt and decay which pervaded the place, were in the last degree repulsive to the somewhat fastidious young man. But this was only a first impression, and it quickly yielded to one of admiration when, as the villagers poured out of their huts to learn the cause of the unwonted excitement of their dogs, George noted with appreciative eyes the splendid physique of the men and women who constituted its inhabitants. They were of mixed breed, ranging from the robust, full-blooded African negro to the slimmer and slighter figure of the Central American Indian with long, straight, black hair and copper-coloured skin. But these were the extreme types; the majority were a mixture of the two races, and the mingling of African and American blood appeared to have had a beneficent effect upon both, the product being an individual of less bulky frame perhaps than his negro progenitor, but lithe, active, supple, and apparently of tireless endurance, superior in intelligence, courage, and good looks to either of the extremes.

The appearance of the two white men, escorted by half a dozen of their own tribe, but apparently not as prisoners, was productive of tremendous excitement among the villagers, to whom such an occurrence was almost unique, for they had only known it to occur once before; but the excitement soon became passive when the leader of the party who had found George and Dyer explained in a few words that the strangers were Englishmen and friends of *El Draque*, and that they had landed from a big canoe, in which they had crossed the Great Water, in order to obtain certain information concerning the city of Nombre.

The tale was scarcely told when there emerged from a hut somewhat larger than the others an individual who, in addition to the apron round his loins, wore a cloak composed entirely of feathers of the most varied and beautiful colours, worked into a sort of pattern, and a coronet made of wing and tail feathers bound about his brows. This was of course Lukabela, the village chieftain, and as George beheld the man coming forward attired in all his finery, he more than suspected that Lukabela had purposely delayed his appearance in order to gain time for the assumption of those symbols of his rank.

Lukabela, petty chieftain of the Cimarrones, was certainly a very fine and imposing figure of a man, as tall as George, with a body and limbs that might have been modelled by a Greek sculptor, and a rather small head. His features were well shaped, his expression keenly intelligent, indomitably resolute, fearless, and somewhat haughty, and there was a certain hardness about the chiselling of his mouth that suggested cruelty. But he listened gravely, yet with a certain restraint, as George explained to him in Spanish the object of his and Dyer's inland journey; and when, in the

course of his explanation, George mentioned that *El Draque* was a personal friend of his, Lukabela's reserve vanished, and he cordially invited the two Englishmen to enter his hut and partake of his hospitality. George would fain have declined that invitation; but he perceived that the moment was one when squeamishness must yield to diplomacy; and, bowing gravely, he accepted the invitation, and the two white men followed the black into the interior of his hut.

The refreshment offered to the Englishmen was not of a very inviting character, for it consisted chiefly of raw flesh—of what particular animal it was difficult to say, but it was, luckily, supplemented by a quantity of delicious fruit of different kinds, with a drink of pungent, and slightly subacid flavour, inviting to the palate and wonderfully refreshing in effect, so that, after all, George and Dyer were able to do full justice to their host's hospitality. At the conclusion of the meal Lukabela produced a bag of deerskin, from which he extracted some dry leaves of a rich brown colour, out of which he deftly manufactured three *cigarros*, and for the first time in his life George had an opportunity to sample the delights of the curious herb now called tobacco. Truth to tell, he did not altogether like the experience; the smoke had a tendency to get into his throat and nostrils, choking him and making him sneeze violently; but Dyer, who had sampled the weed on his previous voyage, and liked it, smoked his *cigarros* as avidly as Lukabela himself; and after the tobacco had been solemnly consumed the chief, who was now in a very placid humour, confessed himself ready to talk and eager to afford his white brothers all the information and help in his power.

It was not help, however, that George wanted just then, as he explained with all the diplomacy he was able to summon to his aid; he informed Lukabela that all he required at that moment was the fullest information possible relative to the defences of Nombre de Dios and the strength of its garrison; and this the Cimarrone was fortunately able to give, for it chanced that he had been in the immediate neighbourhood of the town only a week or two before, and, from a hiding-place beside the road, had actually beheld some five hundred soldiers march out *en route* for Panama, to which place they were returning after having escorted the last gold-train of the year across the isthmus and guarded it in Nombre until it had been shipped and carried safely out to sea. The garrison remaining to guard the town he estimated at less than two hundred, inclusive of the artillerymen who manned the shore battery. Asked what he could tell relative to this same shore battery, Lukabela sketched upon the floor of his hut, with the aid of a charred stick, a rough plan of the town and harbour, upon which he indicated the situation of the battery, giving also the number of guns which it mounted. This completed the measure of the information which he was in a position to furnish, but he added that if any further intelligence was required his English brothers had only to specify it, and he would see that it was at their disposal within four days. Time, however, was now of the utmost value to George; he was burning with impatience to get into the town and ascertain, if he might, his brother's fate, and he believed he had now acquired enough knowledge to enable him to accomplish at least the first of those two objects; he therefore rose to bid the chief farewell, at the same time presenting him with a necklace of big, vari-coloured beads which Lukabela accepted with obvious yet dignified delight. Then he called a man to whom he spoke for a few moments in the peculiar language of the tribe, afterward explaining to George, in Spanish, that he had given instructions that they were to be guided back to the creek by an easier and more direct route than that by which they had come. He also added that if at any future time George should need the assistance of the Cimarrones all that he had to do was to either come or send and ask for it, and it should be his.

The preparations for the descent upon Nombre were all completed in good time before sunset, after which the crew were sent to early supper, and then directed to turn in and secure a few hours' rest before making the start, and this they all did with the exception of the dozen who, under the purser, were to remain and take care of the ship during the absence of the rest, and these kept watch while the others slept.

The night proved admirably adapted for such an expedition as the one contemplated; it was fine, and starlit except when masses of cloud came driving slowly up before the trade-wind and obscured the heavens for a space; although even then the stars in the unclouded portions of the firmament afforded a sufficient amount of light to enable the adventurers to see where they were going, and to distinguish the half-dozen boats that constituted the flotilla. The trade-wind in the offing was blowing a moderate breeze, and there was a young moon, but it would set early, some two hours indeed before the moment at which the expedition was timed to start. George and his officers had fixed upon two o'clock in the morning as the most suitable time for the attack upon the town, and it was estimated that the run from the creek to Nombre, under sail, would occupy about four hours; but in order to allow a small margin for unforeseen contingencies it was arranged that the start should be made at half-past nine o'clock in the evening; at nine o'clock, therefore, all hands were called, and after partaking of a good second supper which they found awaiting them, they were finally inspected and ordered down into the boats, which pushed off from the ship punctually at the moment arranged.

The creek in which the *Nonsuch* rode concealed was so completely land-locked that not a breath of air stirred within it as the boats left the ship's side, the surface of the water was mirror-like in its absolute placidity, and it was only when the men began to descend into the boats, rocking them more or less as they entered them, and so sent a few ripples undulating away across the glassy surface, or when some fish stirred in the depths below, that the phosphorescence latent in the black water awakened and sent forth little threads and evanescent gleams of sea-fire. The complete absence of wind in the creek rendered it necessary that the men should take to their oars when getting under way, and then, indeed, as the blades dipped and rose, the placid surface broke into swirling patches and streaks of brilliant light that enabled the ship-keepers to watch their comrades' progress, and trace it until the boats rounded the point and disappeared.

The calm continued until the boats had made an offing of about a quarter of a mile, when the first faint breathings of the land breeze made themselves felt, then the muffled oars were thankfully laid in, the sails hoisted, and before a steadily strengthening breeze the boats stood off the land upon a diagonal course which not only made the land breeze a fair wind over the larboard quarter, but also carried them toward Nombre while it swept them out toward where the trade-wind was blowing. The boats sailed in line ahead; and when, as was soon the case, their relative speeds had been determined, they were made fast in a string by a stout warp, with the fastest boat leading and the rest following in the order of their speed.

It was exactly half-past one o'clock when, after an uneventful voyage, having previously hove-to beyond the Point, lowered their sails, and snugly stored them and the masts away, the six boats from the *Nonsuch* entered Nombre de Dios harbour and, keeping well within the shadow of the land, crept cautiously along the shore toward the battery, which was to be their first point of attack. There were several ships in the harbour, as could be seen by the number of riding lights dotted about here and there, casting shimmering reflections upon the surface of the placid water; but everything was perfectly quiet, no craft of any description were moving, and if a watch was anywhere set the watchmen were probably fast asleep at that hour, since there was no sound or sign of movement. Yet it struck George as somewhat strange that an air of such absolute security should seem to pervade the port; for things had been said during his visit to San Juan de Ulua which must have caused the authorities there to more than suspect the intention of the Englishmen to descend upon Nombre; and there had been time enough for a fast dispatch boat to make the voyage from the one city to the other, warning Nombre to be on the alert. As young Saint Leger pondered upon these things he grew suspicious that he might quite possibly be blundering into some ingeniously prepared trap, and, calling the boats about him, he gave instructions for the observance of certain additional precautions. But, had he but known, he need not have entertained the slightest anxiety or misgiving; for it afterward transpired that although, as he had all along suspected, the authorities at San Juan had actually dispatched a message to Nombre, recounting in detail all that had happened at the Mexican port, and warning the authorities at Nombre to be on the look out for the English, and to adopt every possible measure to ensure their capture, the vessel bearing the dispatch never reached her destination, and it was shrewdly conjectured that she must have foundered with all hands in the hurricane which the *Nonsuch* had encountered.

The great bell of the Cathedral was booming out the hour of two a.m. as the six boats swerved toward the shore and advanced in line abreast; and some six minutes later they gently grounded upon the beach, the oars were noiselessly laid in, and each man, grasping his weapons, and stepping quietly over the side, waded ashore, while those who stepped over the bows stood ready to push off the boats again, each with its two boat-keepers, at the low-spoken word of the officer in command. Every man knew exactly what his duty was up to the moment of landing, and did it; and so excellent were the arrangements that within two minutes of grounding the boats were again afloat, while those who had come in them were drawn up in two unequal parties on the beach, the duty of the smaller party, under Mr Richard Basset, being to surprise and capture the shore battery, while the other, numbering some forty men, under Saint Leger's leadership, was to march upon the Grand Plaza and seize it, and the Governor's house, which was situated therein. But with so small a force, and the numbers of the enemy unknown, it was necessary to exercise a very considerable amount of precaution lest some unforeseen accident should wreck the entire enterprise; therefore, while the force under George stood to their arms, motionless, close down by the water's edge, Basset with his contingent crept warily up the sand toward the shore battery and presently were swallowed up within its shadows.

Then ensued an anxious five or six minutes of breathless waiting on the part of George and his company, during which no sound save the gentle wash of the miniature breakers on the shore immediately behind them broke the breathless stillness of the night. Then, from the direction of the battery, there suddenly came to the ears of the eagerly listening party the sounds of subdued scuffling, the faint clink of steel, and a shout which suddenly ended in a choking gurgle. The sounds were by no means loud; indeed, so subdued were they that at double the distance of the listening party from the battery they would probably not be heard at all. Nor did they last long; the whole affair, whether for good or for ill, was over in less than five minutes. But George knew that the termination of it was for good, so far as the English were concerned, for had it been otherwise the subdued sounds of the scuffle would have risen into shouts of alarm and the firing of musketry, instead of dying down again into silence, as they did. And presently a man came running down the beach from the battery, bearing a message from Basset to George to the effect that the former had succeeded in taking the garrison completely by surprise and capturing them and the battery practically without striking a single blow—"and Mester Basset he du zay, zur, that if you'll give un half an hour he'll make thicky battery so's he can hold mun again' all comers."

Now, time was pressing, and it was of the utmost importance that the Grand Plaza and its approaches should be secured before the earliest of the inhabitants of the city should be stirring; but it was of at least equal importance that the battery should be rendered capable of being held against attack at least until all the contemplated negotiations had been satisfactorily concluded, since the battery commanded a good part of the city; therefore, after some consideration, George sent back a message to the effect that he and his party would remain where they were for exactly thirty minutes, during which Basset must do all that he could to render his position completely tenable, because at the expiration of that time the advance upon the Grand Plaza would begin. For half an hour, therefore, the party under the command of the young captain crouched, silent and motionless, upon the beach, during the whole of which seemingly endless time George was quaking with apprehension lest some nocturnal prowler, a fisherman, or a boat from one of the craft at anchor in the harbour should appear upon the scene, discover the presence of the lurking Englishmen, and succeed in raising an alarm before a capture could be effected. But fortune seemed to be on their side, for no intruder of any sort appeared, and when at length the half-hour had expired the word was given, and with a little sigh of relief from the strain of suspense, the men rose noiselessly to their feet and moved off in the wake of Dyer, who, knowing the way, was to act as pilot to the party.

Nombre de Dios was even then a city of considerable size and importance: it was, indeed, the most important Spanish settlement on the Atlantic side of the isthmus, exceeding Cartagena in the number of its inhabitants, and rivalled only by Panama on the whole continent. But when that is said it must not be supposed that it covered a very great extent of ground; moreover, the Grand Plaza did not occupy the exact centre of the city, this point being nearly half a mile further inland, consequently a march of some twenty-five minutes sufficed to enable the party to cover the distance between the beach and their destination. But that march had to be made through narrow, tortuous, unlighted streets and for some forty armed men, complete strangers to the place, to accomplish this during the darkest hour of the night without attracting a certain amount of attention was practically an impossibility, let their precautions against so doing be as elaborate as they might. The wonder was that they did not attract a great deal more attention than they actually did, for although the strictest silence was enjoined upon the members of the party, the tramp of forty men and the unavoidable jingle and rattle of their accoutrements sounded appallingly loud in

George's sensitive ear as they passed along through ways so confined that two vehicles could only have passed each other with the utmost difficulty, and where the high walls and overhanging upper stories reflected back every sound in the breathless stillness of the night. But it was the hour when people sleep most heavily, and although there can be little doubt that the sounds of the party's progress must have disturbed a good many people along the route, so complete was the sense of security in the city that only very few troubled themselves to rise from their beds to investigate the cause of the disturbance. And of those few it is safe to say that not one really suspected the actual state of affairs at the moment. Thus it was that the daring intruders actually succeeded in eventually reaching the Grand Plaza and securing the command of its every approach without raising a general alarm.

But of course it was not possible that such a state of affairs could endure very long, nor indeed was any serious effort made to prolong it, for, with one party of his men in possession of the Grand Plaza, and another holding the shore battery, George felt that for all practical purposes the town was his, therefore so soon as the Grand Plaza had been secured all further attempts at secrecy and concealment were abandoned; the men moved hither and thither without restraint, and orders were given in tones which, while not unnecessarily loud, were still loud enough to awaken people here and there in the houses facing the square and apprise them that something quite out of the usual order of things was happening. Men began to rise from their beds and go to their windows to investigate, jalousies were thrown back here and there to enable those behind them to obtain a better view, and when, in the dim light afforded by some half a dozen lamps that were permitted to burn all night in the Plaza, armed men were seen to be moving hither and thither, with the feeble light from the lanterns glancing on their weapons, and with lighted matches glowing redly in the linstocks, a few of the bolder inhabitants summoned up courage enough to shout an inquiry as to what was amiss. And when at length the more persistent ones were told, in good Castilian, that yet had in it the suspicion of an alien twang, that nothing was amiss, and were advised to return to their beds and resume their interrupted slumber, suspicion at last began to awake, and instead of returning to bed the citizens proceeded to arouse their households, and to hurriedly dress. Then a few of the more courageous ones—but these were very few—ventured to sally forth into the square to investigate more closely, only to find that each approach was guarded by a small band of sturdy, bushy-bearded men clad in foreign-looking garments, armed to the teeth with most formidable and business-like weapons, and speaking some uncouth and incomprehensible tongue, who gently but firmly refused to allow them passage. At which those citizens returned somewhat precipitately to their houses and, retiring to their back premises, proceeded to discuss the matter with their neighbours out of adjacent windows, or over garden fences, some of them hazarding the opinion that *El Draque* had returned and, profiting by his previous experience, had surprised the city in the dead of night and secured possession of it. Then, as the opinion spread and, in process of spreading became announced as a certainty, lanterns were lit, spades and mattocks were routed out, and those who had jewels or money to conceal proceeded to conceal them with frantic haste by burying them either in secluded corners of their gardens or beneath the floors of their cellars, while those who had nothing to conceal busied themselves in hastening through the city by its back ways and byways, knocking up their relatives and acquaintances and frightening them out of their wits by informing them that a hostile army had entered the city, the saints knew how, and coming from the saints knew where, and were encamped in the Grand Plaza. At which intelligence the city awoke to life with amazing rapidity, men turned out into the streets and shouted the news to others, or others shouted it to them, women rushed out of their houses weeping, dragging their frightened and screaming children after them, ran aimlessly hither and thither, still further frightening themselves and others as they did so, and then rushed back home again, rightly believing that this was the best and safest place for them; and at least a hundred men in the course of a single hour mounted horses and galloped at breakneck speed to the barracks to acquaint the military commandant of the disaster that had befallen the city, while others again forced their way into the churches and proceeded to ring the bells frantically. By four o'clock in the morning every man, woman and child in the city was broad awake, and the air was vibrant with the discordant clang of bells furiously rung by unaccustomed hands, pealing out above and piercing through that indescribable murmur of sound which tells the hearer that an entire population is swarming the streets, half frenzied with terror, the whole punctuated at frequent intervals by the scream of a woman or child, the shouts of men, and the occasional crack of a musket-shot fired by someone demented with fright and quite irresponsible for his actions.

Meanwhile, having secured possession of the Grand Plaza and made the best dispositions in his power for its defence, George, accompanied by a bodyguard of four men, proceeded to the Governor's house and, arousing its inmates, demanded an immediate interview with His Excellency Don Sebastian Salvador Alfonso de Albareda, the individual who just then chanced to hold the responsible post of Governor of His Most Catholic Majesty's city of Nombre de Dios on the Spanish Main.

When first awakened, His Excellency was disposed to be somewhat explosive upon the subject of so untimely an invasion of his slumbers; but when the terrified major domo of the establishment informed him that the city had been surprised and taken possession of by a party of ruffianly English who appeared to have no sense of respect for any earthly thing, and one of whom claimed to be a friend of, or in some way connected with, that redoubtable pirate and most valiant cavalier, *El Draque*, the Don's wrath suddenly subsided, for he felt that the matter was indeed of extreme moment, brooking no delay; he therefore gave instructions that the Most Illustrious One who claimed to be the chief ruffian of the lot should be ushered with all due ceremony and respect into His Excellency's reception room; and while the major domo retired to execute this errand the Governor hastily assumed the garments that he had laid aside a few hours earlier, and in a remarkably brief space of time presented himself before his unwelcome visitor.

Entering the room with stately deliberation, he bowed to George in his grandest manner, and said, as calmly as though interviewing English raiders were an everyday occurrence with him:

"Good morning, señor! You have business with me?"

"I have, señor, if in you I have the honour to behold the Governor of the city of Nombre de Dios," answered George, with a dignity of manner at least equal to that of the Spaniard.

"Good!" returned Don Sebastian. "I have the honour to be the individual you refer to."

"Then, in that case," said George, "I will proceed at once to explain my business with your Excellency. In the first place, I have the honour to inform you that your city is in my hands and at my mercy; and although my followers who hold possession of the Grand Plaza are but a few in number, they are so placed, and are so resolutely determined to hold their positions, that they can only be displaced at the cost of great loss of life to both sides. Also another party of my followers is in possession of the shore battery, and their commander has instructions to turn the guns of the place upon the town and open fire upon it at the first signs of conflict which may reach his ears. In order, therefore, to save the lives and property of the citizens from needless destruction, I have first to request that your Excellency will at once take such steps as may be necessary to prevent all possibility of an attack upon my people by any soldiers who may happen to be in garrison here, or by the citizens themselves. And when that has been done I shall have the honour to explain to your Excellency the precise nature of the business which has brought me to Nombre."

Don Sebastian bowed smilingly, displaying a very fine set of even, white teeth, of which he was quite pardonably proud. This, however, was merely a habit, for he was not thinking of his teeth just then. What he was thinking was that it was an atrocious misfortune that the city of which he had the honour to be Governor should have been selected for attack by these truculent English, who were no doubt bent upon avenging the reverse of their fellow-countrymen at San Juan during the previous year. But if this were the case, why had they not attacked San Juan, instead of coming to Nombre to make trouble and bring about his ruin? For the statement which this great hulking boy captain had just made to him showed clearly enough that he and his party could not be driven out of Nombre without desperate fighting, accompanied by tremendous loss of life and ruinous destruction of property, if indeed it could be achieved at all, with a garrison of less than one hundred and fifty men, fifty of whom constituted the garrison of the shore battery and were now prisoners, if the young Englishman spoke the truth, which Don Sebastian did not doubt. No, clearly, fighting was not to be thought of, excepting possibly as a very last resource. But he, Don Sebastian, was a man of the world, a man of mature experience in the ways of diplomacy, and surely far more than a match, in this respect, for the simple-looking lad who stood there staring at him so solemnly. Yes, diplomacy was undoubtedly the way out of this unfortunate scrape; the Englishman must be made to realise that the capture of Nombre was a stupid mistake, out of which neither honour nor profit was to be gained; and once convinced of this, he would perhaps withdraw himself and his forces peaceably. These thoughts flashed through Don Sebastian's brain while George was still speaking; and by the time that the latter had finished, His Excellency had formulated his plans and was ready to reply. Hence his benignant smile, which was intended to suggest also a tinge of sarcasm and incredulity.

"Señor," he said, "I will not be so presumptuous as to suggest the slightest doubt of your own conviction that the city of Nombre de Dios is absolutely at your mercy. But you must pardon me if I decline to share that conviction. I know the strength and courage of the troops who constitute our present garrison, and, without for a moment casting the slightest reflection upon the strength or courage of your own people, you must permit me to believe that, should we unhappily be driven to resort to force of arms, we could drive you and yours into the sea. But I trust," he continued hastily, in response to a certain gleam in George's eye that had not escaped his notice, "we may not be forced to the adoption of any such extreme measure. For I may as well inform you at once that if you have come hither with any thought of pillage, you are too late; the plate fleet left here nearly two months ago with the year's accumulations of treasure, and our treasure-house is at the moment absolutely empty, as I am prepared to prove to you by taking you to it, if you doubt my word. And, this being the case, I trust it will not be difficult for us to come to some amicable arrangement by which you may be induced to quit Nombre without the resort to measures on either side which could only result in unnecessary and much to be deplored bloodshed."

"Señor," answered George, with a deep bow—he was rapidly becoming as punctiliously courteous of manner as the Spaniards themselves—"I am charmed and delighted to find you so readily prepared to adopt a reasonable and friendly attitude in the face of existing circumstances. I accept unreservedly your statement as to the emptiness of your treasure-house, and will certainly not put you to the injurious necessity of proving it by conducting me thither to satisfy myself upon the point; and I do this the more readily since my visit to Nombre has no reference whatever to what you are pleased to term pillage. No; my object in coming hither was of a quite different kind; and if I have taken possession of Nombre it is merely in order that I might enjoy the advantage of being in a position to drive a bargain with the authorities of the town, should I unhappily find them less amenable to reason than your Excellency seems disposed to be."

This was excellent, very much better than Don Sebastian had dared to hope; these English were not bent upon plunder, it would appear; and, that being the case, he cared very little what else their object might be; it would be strange indeed if he, a master of the art of diplomacy, could not get rid of them without a fight, and so not only avoid a severe reprimand from the Viceroy, but also perhaps earn his hearty commendation. Don Sebastian's spirits rose; the imbroglio was but a petty thing after all; and in imagination he already pictured not only the peaceful but the friendly departure of the English, and himself receiving the compliments of the Viceroy upon the tactfulness of his, Don Sebastian's, management of the affair, which might easily be represented as being infinitely more serious than it really was. Therefore he bowed to George more deeply and smiled at him more expansively than ever as he replied:

"Señor Englishman, I am gratified beyond all power of expression to find in you so amicable a disposition, and I feel certain that whatever may be the occasion of the visit with which you have honoured us, neither you nor I, nor the citizens of Nombre, will have the smallest reason to regret it. But perhaps, señor, it has escaped your memory that you have not yet enlightened me as to that occasion?"

"No," answered George; "oh! no, it has not. I shall come to that presently. But, meanwhile, time is passing, and I should like you to take those steps I spoke of just now to prevent a collision between your troops, or the citizens, and my people. For I warn your Excellency that if fighting is once permitted to begin it will be exceedingly difficult to stop it, and before that happens you may find the greater part of your city in ruins. Therefore I beg that you will not lose a moment in adopting the measures which I suggest. When that is done it will be time enough for us to talk together about the business which has brought me hither."

## Chapter Fourteen.

### How the Governor of Panama treated Don Sebastian's request.

The imminence of the danger indicated by the young Englishman appealed so powerfully to Don Sebastian that he acted upon the suggestion which accompanied it without further delay, excusing himself to George for temporarily withdrawing himself, and assuring the young man that not a moment should be lost in taking every possible precaution to prevent a collision between his own countrymen and the English. But he had not been absent longer than twenty minutes when he re-appeared, in a state of dismay, to explain that the messengers whom he had dispatched in various directions were returning, one after another, with the intimation that they had been turned back by the parties of Englishmen who were holding the Grand Plaza, who would not permit them to leave the Square; also they had brought with them the news that from the sounds which had met their ears, they judged the city to be in a state of complete turmoil, and fighting imminent.

Now, it happened that the first of these two contingencies had been entirely overlooked by George, who felt a good deal disturbed also by the thought that fighting might yet begin despite all his precautions; he therefore directed Don Sebastian to collect his messengers, and when this had been done, in the course of a very few minutes, the young English captain himself went forth with them to the several points in the Square at which they sought egress, and personally instructed the various parties of his men to allow the messengers to pass. Then, having seen them all safely out of the Square, noted for himself the signs of disturbance and panic which seemed to everywhere prevail throughout the city, and issued certain additional instructions to his own men, George hastened back to Government House, where he found Don Sebastian anxiously awaiting his return. He explained to the Don the state of affairs at that moment existing, so far as he had been able to ascertain it, expressed the opinion that bloodshed might yet be averted, and then proceeded to unfold to the Governor the precise nature of the business that had brought him and his men to Nombre de Dios; that business being of course the liberation of his brother and such other prisoners as still remained in the hands of the Spaniards.

"I have already had the honour of explaining to your Excellency," he said in conclusion, "that I am not here with a view to pillage; I have exacted from San Juan what I regard as fair and just pecuniary compensation for the Viceroy's treachery to my friends, Hawkins and Drake, while they lay in the harbour of that city, a year ago; and, as I have already pointed out, I have only seized Nombre in order that I may be in a position to drive a bargain with you.

"Now, I learned from the authorities at San Juan de Ulua that, of the Englishmen who fell into their hands upon the occasion just referred to, seventeen—of whom my brother was one—were sentenced to the galleys, and shipped on board a vessel named the *San Mathias*, bound to this port. Now, señor, your city is in my hands, and it is in my power to sack it, if I will. But I am prepared to hold the city to ransom upon ridiculously advantageous terms to you; those terms being simply that, in return for the surrender of those seventeen Englishmen into my hands, safe and sound, I will withdraw my men, and retire from Nombre, leaving the city itself and the property of its inhabitants untouched."

Don Sebastian gasped. "Señor," he exclaimed, throwing out his hands appealingly, "how shall I say it? How shall I make you understand and believe that you have asked practically the only thing that it is out of my power to grant?"

"Why? What do you mean?" demanded George, in his turn. "Out of your power to grant? I do not understand your Excellency. Do you mean to tell me that those seventeen men are dead? That your accursed Inquisition has claimed them? Or—what do you mean?"

"I mean, illustrious señor, that not one of those men now remains in Nombre. They doubtless came here, since the authorities of San Juan say so, but—stay now—let me think—yes—if those men ever arrived here there will doubtless be a record of their arrival, and yes, I seem to recall some of the circumstances, but the multiplicity of my duties as Governor of the city renders it difficult to—. With your permission, señor, I will summon my secretary; he will doubtless be able to throw some light upon the affair."

"Pray do so at once, señor," answered George. "It was solely to gain intelligence of the whereabouts of those men and to secure their release that I came to Nombre; and if you cannot at least afford me some assistance, I am afraid that it will be a bad thing for your city."

"But, noble señor," remonstrated Don Sebastian, "you will surely not hold Nombre responsible—"

"For the disappearance of those men?" interrupted George. "Indeed I will, then, your Excellency, unless you can afford me satisfactory evidence as to what has become of them."

"Permit me, señor," said Don Sebastian, and smartly struck a small hand bell on the table. An attendant almost instantly appeared, to whom the Governor said peremptorily:

"Find Señor Montalvo, and say that I desire his immediate presence in this room."

Some five minutes later a smart, dapper-looking young Spaniard entered and, bowing low, requested to know his Excellency's pleasure.

"Señor Montalvo," said Don Sebastian, "about a year ago a ship named the—" he hesitated and looked inquiringly at George.

"The *San Mathias*," prompted George.

"Exactly, the *San Mathias*," continued the Governor, "is said to have arrived here from San Juan de Ulua, bringing from thence seventeen Englishmen, prisoners, who were sentenced to the galleys—"



"Yes, your Excellency," interrupted the secretary. "I perfectly remember the circumstances, for it occurred while you were temporarily laid up with fever, and I transacted the whole of the business connected with it."

"Ah!" exclaimed his Excellency, with an air of relief. "Then that sufficiently accounts for my very imperfect recollection of the affair"—with a glance at George to direct the latter's attention to the explanation. "Proceed, Señor Montalvo," continued the Governor; "tell us all that you know concerning the matter."

"Certainly, your Excellency," answered the secretary. "With your Excellency's permission I will fetch the official records, containing the full and complete account of the affair." And, bowing deeply to Don Sebastian and George, he hurried away, and presently returned with an exceedingly bulky volume under his arm. This he placed on the table, opened it, referred to an index, and then turned up the required entry.

"Yes," he said, "here we have it: 'December 7th, 1568. Arrived from San Juan de Ulua, the ship *San Mathias*, Juan Pacheco, master, having on board seventeen Englishmen captured during an unprovoked attack upon the plate fleet lying in San Juan harbour, and—'"

"That is a lie," broke in George. "The English ships were the attacked, not the attackers. But—go on."

"—Harbour," resumed the secretary, reading, "'and sentenced by the Military Commandant to the galleys for life. Their names are as follows—'"

"Stop," interrupted George again, and, fumbling in his pocket, he produced a document—the one that Don Manuel Rebiera had furnished him with upon the first day of the *Nonsuch's* visit to San Juan—and carefully unfolded it.

"Now, proceed with your reading, señor, if you please," he said to the secretary.

The secretary read out the names of the seventeen English prisoners, which George found to agree with those recorded in his list. When the secretary came to the last name he paused for a moment.

"Yes," assented George, "those names appear to be correct. Now, the first thing that I wish to know is—what became of those men?"

"They were confined in the prison here for the space of just one month," answered the secretary, "during which communication was made to the Governor of Panama, stating the circumstances of the case, and requesting to know whether he could apportion the prisoners among the galleys stationed at his port, as there are no galleys attached to Nombre. The reply was in the affirmative, and on January 8th of this present year the prisoners were dispatched to Panama in charge of the escort which had just brought over a consignment of treasure. The officer in command of the escort gave his receipt for the persons of the prisoners, and—that is all that we here in Nombre know about them."

That was all that they there in Nombre knew about them! And it was to obtain this trifling scrap of information that the English adventurers had resorted to such extreme and high-handed action as actually to capture one of the most important cities on the Spanish Main, and were now holding possession of it by the skin of their teeth, in the face of overwhelming numbers, by sheer downright audacity and arrogance of demeanour! Young Saint Leger smiled inwardly as the amazing character of the anti-climax began to force itself upon his notice; and, being a lad with a keen appreciation of humour, it was with difficulty that he conquered an almost irresistible inclination to laugh aloud while he reflected upon the situation. By an effort of will, however, he conquered the desire to indulge in untimely mirth—for he fully realised that he and his followers were standing upon the crumbling brink of a volcano, and said, with an air of great dissatisfaction and annoyance:

"That is all you can tell me about them! But, señor, this is really most unsatisfactory. For all practical purposes I am no wiser than I was when I left Saint Juan. This information will not materially assist me to find and procure the release of my unfortunate fellow-countrymen. I am afraid I must ask you to offer me a suggestion. You must remember that I am here to avenge and obtain satisfaction for the treacherous treatment of my countrymen last year, by your King's representative, the Viceroy of Mexico; and, whatever hardship, or suffering, or loss his Most Catholic Majesty's lieges in this country may be called upon to endure at my hands, in my determination to obtain satisfaction for that outrage, they must lay to the door of his Excellency Don Martin Enriquez. Therefore, for your own sakes, I look to you to assist me in every possible way. I have explained to you the nature of my business here, which, I repeat, is to procure the immediate release of those seventeen unfortunate Englishmen, unjustly doomed to life-long servitude in your galleys. How is it to be done? I look to you for suggestions."

Don Sebastian shrugged his shoulders, and stared helplessly at his secretary; and the latter, recognising the nature of the appeal conveyed by his chief's eyes, folded his arms, sank his chin upon his chest, and proceeded to stalk meditatively to and fro the length of the room. His meditations continued for close upon ten minutes, then, as George began to manifest symptoms of growing impatience, Señor Montalvo flung up his head with the triumphant air of one who has solved a difficult problem, and said:

"It appears to me, Excellency, and most noble Adelantado, that the only thing to be done is for your Excellency to address a letter to the Governor of Panama, explaining the situation, and requesting his help to determine the present whereabouts of the prisoners, entrust that letter to a reliable and intelligent messenger, who fully understands all the circumstances of the case, and let him confer with his Excellency Don Silvio as to the steps necessary to secure the satisfaction of the English señor's demands."

The Governor considered the matter for a few seconds, and then turned to George.

"There is a suggestion for you, señor, and a very excellent one, I think I may permit myself to say. How does it commend itself to you?"

"How far is it from here to Panama, and how long will it take your messenger to traverse the distance?" demanded George.

"By the Gold Road the distance is a trifle over forty miles, and a well-mounted messenger can cover it in six hours," answered Don Sebastian.

"So that if he were dispatched at once he could execute his mission, and be back here in Nombre to-morrow evening?" suggested George.

"*Madre de Dios!* Is the man mad?" ejaculated Don Sebastian, throwing up his hands. Then he turned hastily to George. "Ten thousand pardons for my involuntary exclamation," he apologised; "but I fear you scarcely realise what travelling in this country means. Upon his arrival in Panama, my messenger would imperatively need rest, and by the time that he has refreshed himself it will be too late to see the Governor. Then, to-morrow, it may be nearly or quite mid-day before he can obtain audience of his Excellency; and by the time that the conference is over and my messenger has secured the required information, it will be altogether too late for him to start upon the return journey. Thus I do not think we can possibly expect him back before the afternoon of the day after to-morrow. You agree with me, señor, I am sure."

"No, señor, I do not," retorted George. "I can see no cause at all for such delay. Upon his arrival in Panama, let your messenger proceed at once to the Governor's house and demand an immediate interview. Let him explain that the matter is in the last degree urgent and pressing, and let him take whatever further steps may be necessary to secure prompt attention. And then let him transact his business. There will be plenty of time for him to rest and refresh himself when that is done. And to-morrow, if everything has been satisfactorily arranged, he can start at dawn, and be here again shortly after mid-day."

"*Caramba!* With all submission, señor, what you propose is impossible. No man could possibly do it," exclaimed Don Sebastian, throwing up his hands.

"But why not, man, why not?" persisted George.

"Why not?" reiterated the Governor. "Because, señor, it would kill him, in this climate."

"It would certainly not kill an Englishman; but, of course, I don't know about a Spaniard," retorted George.

Señor Montalvo hastened to intervene. "Pardon, Excellency," he remarked, bowing to the Governor, "but since the matter appears to be of such extreme urgency, permit me to undertake the mission to the Governor of Panama. Having been privileged to be present at this interview with the English Adelantado, I think I may venture to say that I clearly understand the several points in the rather delicate negotiation which it is proposed to open with his Excellency Don Calderon, and can probably conduct it as successfully as any other available person. And I shall also do my utmost to execute my task with all possible diligence, ignoring fatigue for the time being and until my task has been accomplished."

"Very well," replied Don Sebastian, with evident relief. "I am greatly obliged to you, Señor Montalvo, for your offer, which I accept. And now, while I prepare my communication to Don Silvio, you had better go and make ready for your journey. The whole of my stable is entirely at your service, but if you will permit me to advise, I think you could not possibly do better than take Josefa, the black mule. She will carry you easily and rapidly as far as Venta Cruz, where you will leave her, and proceed for the remaining half of the journey upon another animal, picking up Josefa again upon your return. Now, be off with you, and get ready; and by the time that your preparations are complete, my letter to Don Silvio shall be ready."

"Now, señor," he continued, seating himself at a table and drawing writing materials toward him as soon as the secretary had vanished, "what am I to say to Don Silvio? Kindly state your full requirements, and I will see what can be done toward satisfying them."

George pulled out his list of prisoners, and laid it beside Don Sebastian on the table.

"My requirements," he said, "are very simple. All that I ask is the immediate release and delivery to me of the seventeen Englishmen whose names are inscribed on that document."

"The *immediate* release?" reiterated his Excellency. "But, señor, with all submission, to demand that may well be to demand the impossible. If I may be permitted to express an opinion, I should say that there is scarcely the remotest probability that any of the men here enumerated are still within the jurisdiction of the Governor of Panama. I have not a doubt that every one of them has, long ere this, been apportioned out among the various galleys belonging to the port, and in all likelihood every man is at this moment somewhere at sea. The utmost that Don Silvio will probably be able to do will be to indicate the name of the galley to which each man has been condemned, and perhaps to state, in a few cases, the present approximate locality of the galleys."

"You think so?" returned George, an ominous frown gathering upon his brow. "Then, all I can say, Don Sebastian, is that if the Governor of Panama can do no more than that, it will be disastrously unfortunate for you and your city!"

Don Sebastian became visibly paler as he stirred uneasily in his chair, regarding the young Englishman questioningly and in silence for a few moments. Then he said:

"Señor, pardon me if I say that I scarcely understand you. You surely cannot mean that you will hold this town responsible for your inability to obtain possession of the men you seek?"

"You are mistaken, señor, if you imagine any such thing," retorted George. "I hold *every* Spaniard on the continent

responsible for the safety and well-being of those men. It was by Spanish treachery that they are at this moment living in hell upon earth—for I know something of what life as a galley-slave means—and I am going to employ every possible means at my disposal to bring pressure upon you and your fellow-countrymen to right the wrong that has been done. Therefore, I beg that, in communicating with the Governor of Panama, you will make it clear to him that, to save Nombre from sack and destruction, he must exhaust his utmost powers to secure the speedy release of those men.”

“But, señor—” began Don Sebastian, remonstratingly.

“Not another word, señor,” interrupted George, determinedly. “What I have said, I have said. Tell Don Silvio that I hold the shore battery, and that, therefore, Nombre de Dios is absolutely at my mercy. Tell him also that I am holding you, among others, as a hostage to secure ourselves from interference or attack by soldiery or civilians, and, in short, make it clear to him that if those men are not speedily surrendered to me, the Spaniards will have to pay dearly for them in blood and treasure. Now, please proceed with the preparation of your communication to Don Silvio, for time is flying.”

Whereupon, Don Sebastian, clutching his locks with his left hand, took pen in his right, and proceeded, with a great deal of difficulty, to draft a letter setting forth in cold black and white the critical state of affairs then existing in Nombre, and urgently entreating the Governor of Panama to leave no stone unturned to find and surrender the seventeen Englishmen, on account of whom all this fuss and pother was being made, lest worse come of it. The Don was not a particularly fluent correspondent, but he grew almost eloquent when he strove to impress upon his fellow-governor the inexorable determination displayed by the young English captain, and he wound up by quoting two or three Spanish proverbs to the effect that of two evils it was always best to choose the lesser, and that it was folly to cut off one’s nose to spite one’s face, these being intended to support Don Sebastian’s contention that it would be better to surrender the Englishmen and forego one’s righteous desire to revenge oneself upon them, rather than that a Spanish town like Nombre de Dios should be subjected to the horrors of sack and pillage. The fair copy of the letter, after the draft had been submitted for George’s approval, was still in process of being written when Señor Montalvo, booted and spurred, and otherwise dressed for the road, made his appearance. The letter, however, was finished at last, signed, sealed with the official seal, and handed to the secretary, who, a minute later, mounted upon Josefa, the black mule, went clattering out of the Grand Plaza, *en route* for Panama.

“Now,” said Saint Leger, when the important business of the letter to the Governor of Panama had been satisfactorily disposed of, “with your Excellency’s approval we will all retire to the shore battery, where I propose to concentrate my forces until a reply arrives from his Excellency of Panama. I noted, when leaving, that the guns of the battery effectually command the town, therefore, by holding the battery I shall hold the town also; moreover, by withdrawing my men to it, there will be the less likelihood of collisions between my people and your countrymen. I must trouble your Excellency to accompany me, and to put up, for a few days, with somewhat rougher quarters than you are accustomed to; but we will make things as comfortable as we can for you, and you may take with you any three of your servants whom you would wish to accompany you. If you will kindly issue any orders that you may wish to give, we will go at once.”

It was in vain that Don Sebastian begged to be excused from accompanying his captors to the battery, in vain that he alternately protested, represented, promised, and almost threatened; George turned a deaf ear to everything that the poor man found to say and half an hour later saw the whole party which had held the Grand Plaza marching in good order through the streets toward the battery, with the Governor and his three servants, the latter bearing heavy loads of his Excellency’s baggage, in the centre of the solid phalanx. By that time the townspeople had recovered from their first panic, and had almost settled down again into their normal condition, the shops were nearly all open, excitement was rapidly subsiding, and the citizens were mostly going about their business pretty much as usual; the English, therefore, experienced no inconvenience or interruption during their march, and in due time reached the battery, the gates of which were thrown open to receive them, and closed and bolted again after they had all entered.

The first thing was for the newcomers to get breakfast, for which they were all—with, perhaps, the exception of the Governor—by this time quite ready. Then, at the conclusion of the meal, George accompanied Basset round the battery upon a tour of inspection, during which the latter pointed out what he had done, and was still doing, to strengthen the defences of the place; and the young captain was greatly gratified to see that a few hours’ more work would render the place practically impregnable to assault, and that all that they then need fear was a protracted siege, which, however, did not enter into the Englishmen’s calculations.

The entire party from the *Nonsuch* were now housed in the battery, for Basset had no sooner secured possession of the place than, very wisely, he hailed the men who had been left in the boats to take care of them, directing them to beach their craft under the battery walls, moor them securely, remove all gear, and convey it and themselves into the battery forthwith, which they did, this arrangement rendering both them and their boats absolutely secure from interference.

By mid-afternoon Basset’s plans had all been carried out, and the battery placed in a thorough state for effective defence; and now all that remained was to await with patience the return of Señor Montalvo from Panama with the results of his mission. George had estimated that with due diligence on the part of the secretary, it should be possible for him to execute his mission in time to be back in Nombre by the afternoon of the following day; but Don Sebastian was not so sanguine; he knew the Spanish propensity to procrastinate, and he also knew that Don Silvio Calderon, the Governor of Panama, was not the man to permit himself to be hurried, particularly in the interests of other people; also he knew, a great deal better than George, how many difficulties stood in the way of securing the speedy release of prisoners from the galleys, even under the most favourable circumstances. He therefore did all that he could, by representation, to prepare his captors for a certain amount of delay; consequently when the next day passed without bringing any sign of the secretary’s return, nobody was very greatly surprised or disappointed.

But it was not until four full days had passed, and the afternoon of the fifth was well advanced, that Señor Montalvo, hot, dusty, travel-stained, and weary, re-appeared; and when Don Sebastian had twice perused the letter of which the secretary was the bearer, it was perfectly evident, from the expression of dismay upon his Excellency's countenance, and his muttered ejaculations of "Fool! thrice-sodden fool!—pig!—obstinate mule!" and other uncomplimentary expressions, that the secretary's mission had not been brilliantly successful. On the contrary, it soon developed that the errand had proved an utter failure, for after an hour's earnest and anxious converse and discussion with Señor Montalvo, Don Sebastian approached George, and, with every evidence of the utmost distress, handed him the reply of the Governor of Panama to read.

The letter was brief and to the point. It opened with a pithy but pungent expression of Don Silvio's opinion of the capacity of a Governor who could permit his city to be captured and held by a handful of English pirates; then proceeded succinctly to refuse to accede to any of those pirates' demands; and wound up by saying that if the garrison and citizens of Nombre were such fools as to allow themselves to be surprised, they must take the consequences, whatever they might be. But, Don Silvio concluded by saying, if the city of Nombre were sacked by the English, the citizens might console themselves with the assurance that they would be amply avenged, for he (Don Silvio) was dispatching every soldier in Panama to the assistance of Nombre, and if, upon their arrival, any English were found in the city, they would be exterminated with the utmost promptitude!

Like Don Sebastian, George read this precious effusion of a pompous, consequential, pig-headed official twice before commenting upon it. Then he turned to the secretary and said:

"Señor, are you cognisant of the contents of this letter?"

"I believe so, in a general way, Illustrissimo," answered Señor Montalvo. "Of course," he continued, "I have not read the communication itself, but I was able to pretty well gather from Don Silvio's remarks when I explained my mission to him what was the nature of the reply he intended to make to Don Sebastian's request."

"Describe Don Silvio to me," demanded George.

"He is a man somewhat above medium height," replied the secretary, "of rather striking appearance, dark complexioned, sallow, hasty and irascible of temper, has a very exalted opinion of his position and dignity, is very impatient of anything in the most remote degree approaching to dictation, and has a profound belief in his own judgment, and in his qualifications generally for the post which he occupies. He is of opinion, for example, that had he been Governor of Nombre, you and your followers would never have succeeded in establishing yourselves in the city."

"I see," said George. "Yes, I think from your description I can form a tolerably accurate picture of the man. Is he a man of his word?"

"As how, precisely, Señor Captain?" demanded the secretary.

"Well," explained George, "in this letter he announces his intention to dispatch every soldier at his disposal in Panama to the relief of this city. Do you think he will really do so?"

"Undoubtedly, señor," was the answer. "I was present when Don Silvio issued the order, and when I left Panama the soldiers were already mustering for the march."

"And how many soldiers do you suppose are available for this service?" demanded George.

"Five hundred cavalry, and twelve hundred foot soldiers, with six batteries of horse artillery," was the startling reply.

It was a reply for which young Saint Leger was wholly unprepared; it startled him, while at the same time it inspired him with a most audacious idea. He carefully controlled his features, however, quite conscious of the fact that both Don Sebastian and his secretary were intently watching him, and proceeded with his questioning in the same level, quiet tones as before.

"And when do you think we may look for the arrival of those soldiers?" he asked.

"The cavalry may arrive at any moment," answered Señor Montalvo, "while as for the artillery and the foot soldiers, they should be here by to-morrow's noon."

"Ah! I thank you, señor, for the frankness with which you have replied to my questions," said George. "This news is important and unexpected; I must ask you to excuse me, gentlemen, while I retire to confer with my officers. What you, Señor Montalvo, have told me may possibly necessitate an alteration of my plans." And, so saying, the young Englishman bowed to the two Spaniards and left them, going out to find Basset and Dyer, that he might communicate to them the momentous news as to the dispatch of the soldiers from Panama, and also to broach to them the audacious project that had just suggested itself to him.

The three Englishmen conversed together earnestly and eagerly for the best part of an hour, while they paced to and fro upon the parapet of the battery, well out of earshot of anybody else; and at length they came to a certain decision which they at once proceeded to put into effect, George going off to rejoin the Governor and his secretary, while Basset and Dyer hastened to muster their respective forces, and put into effect the preliminaries of the plan which they had agreed upon.

When at length Saint Leger rejoined Don Sebastian and Señor Montalvo, he found his guests—or prisoners, they scarcely knew which to consider themselves—awaiting his return in a state of anxiety and perturbation, which they took no pains to conceal. Prominent in their minds was George's threat to sack and burn the city in such an

eventuality as had just arisen, and they had already seen enough of the young man to convince them that he was quite capable of carrying out his threat. There was but one hope for them, they felt, and that lay in the suggestion artfully put forth by Señor Montalvo, that the cavalry might be expected to arrive at any moment. This statement was the result of a sudden and brilliant inspiration which had come to the secretary while George was questioning him. As a matter of fact, Señor Montalvo felt tolerably certain that the cavalry could not possibly arrive until the morrow, but it had suddenly occurred to him that if he stated this, it would show the English that there was still time for them to sack the town, while by stating that a considerable body of troops might be momentarily expected to arrive he hoped to frighten the insolent strangers into immediate abandonment of the town, without waiting to sack it.

And he had every reason to congratulate himself that his ruse had been successful, for George's first words when he returned to the room occupied by the two Spaniards were:

"Your Excellency, the news which Señor Montalvo has brought from Panama has caused me to very materially modify my plans. When you were preparing your dispatch to his Excellency the Governor of Panama, I gave you to understand that in the event of Don Silvio's refusal to entertain my proposals, I would sack and destroy the city of Nombre de Dios. But since then I have had time for reflection; I have come to recognise that it would be unfair of me to visit Don Silvio's obstinacy too severely upon you and your town; moreover, I am in hopes that by further correspondence with him he may be brought to see the desirability of saving you and Nombre by a merely nominal sacrifice on his part; therefore, after consultation with my officers, I have decided to spare Nombre for the present, and to withdraw from it in order to afford you time for further negotiations with Don Silvio. But before withdrawing I intend to take the precaution of destroying this battery, so that upon my return I shall, at least, not have it to contend with. And, understand me, your Excellency, I shall return again, but not until the soldiers now expected have been withdrawn from the town. That must certainly happen soon, and when it does you may expect to see me back, for I shall find means to learn everything of importance that happens in Nombre. And when I next come, my visit will be a final one; for unless you are then prepared to hand me over the seventeen prisoners I have asked for, I will not leave one stone of Nombre upon another. You will kindly remain here until I am ready to evacuate the battery, when you will be free to return to Government House."

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## Chapter Fifteen.

### How the Englishmen marched across the isthmus to Panama.

As Saint Leger quitted the room Señor Montalvo gave vent to a chuckle of delighted self-gratulation, much to the surprise, and somewhat to the annoyance, of his Excellency, Don Sebastian Salvador Alfonso de Albareda, Governor of the city of Nombre de Dios.

"Señor Montalvo," he said austerely, "you are surely forgetting yourself. I see nothing at all in that truculent young Englishman's threat that is in the least degree calculated to excite the risibility of anyone whose misfortune it is to be a dweller in this god-forsaken city of Nombre de Dios. Not even its name seems to protect it in the slightest degree from the sacrilegious violence of these Lutheran dogs. Pray explain yourself, señor."

"Ten thousand pardons, your Excellency," exclaimed Montalvo, still grinning delightedly. "It was not so much the Englishman's threats at which I was amused—although I think we may perhaps permit ourselves to smile at them, too; what I was chiefly amused at was the stroke of genius by which I have fortunately been able to save our city from sack by those pestilent English to-day."

"You—you have saved Nombre from being sacked to-day?" exclaimed Don Sebastian. "Still I fail to understand you, señor."

"Did you not observe, your Excellency, that, in reply to a question by the young English pirate, I mentioned that the cavalry from Panama might be expected to appear here at any moment? That was a little slip of the tongue on my part, the result of a happy inspiration. Had I replied truthfully I should have said that the cavalry could hardly by any possibility arrive until some time to-morrow; and the result of that reply would in all probability have been an instant order by that young English dog to sack the city, which work might easily be accomplished before the appearance of the cavalry upon the scene. But did you mark the expression of Señor Englishman's face when I said that the cavalry might be expected at any moment? It was terror, your Excellency—terror and consternation! And the result is an order for the instant evacuation of this battery and the retreat of the English from the town. That youngster at once recognised that if the cavalry were close at hand there would be no time to sack the town: he and his people would be caught and exterminated to a man. Hence his magnanimous resolve to spare us for the time being. *Now* does your Excellency understand?"

"Ah! yes; of course I do, and I beg your pardon for my hasty rebuke, Montalvo," exclaimed Don Sebastian, seizing his companion's hand and shaking it heartily. "*Caramba!* that was a brilliant idea of yours about the cavalry, and it has had the effect that you foresaw; the rascally Englishmen are much too anxious regarding the safety of their own skins to think of plundering the town now; and, please the Virgin, in a few hours we shall be well rid of them, and I shall have escaped getting into very serious trouble—thanks to you, Montalvo. You have placed me under a very heavy obligation, my friend, and I shall not forget it.

"But there is still the future to be thought of. It is true that we have escaped by the skin of our teeth for the moment, Montalvo; for the moment only. But if I am any judge of character, that English *muchacho* will return, as he threatened he would; and then what are we going to do?"

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil, your Excellency," answered Montalvo, "and we shall have time enough to think of that when these dogs have gone. Did you notice what the boy captain said? He will return again, but not until the soldiers now expected have been withdrawn from the town. Well, it must be your care, Excellency, that the soldiers

shall not be withdrawn from Nombre until the patience of these English pirates has become thoroughly exhausted, and they have taken themselves off elsewhere—precisely where they go is a matter that need not concern us so long as it is sufficiently far from Nombre. And while we are enjoying the protection of the soldiers it must be our business to so strengthen the defences of the town that—*Madre de Dios!* what is happening now?”

The worthy secretary might well exclaim, for his illuminating discourse was at this moment broken in upon and interrupted by a series of deafening explosions of so violent a character that they set the very walls of the building trembling. They were caused by the bursting of the cannon mounted in the battery, and the blowing-up of the defences which Basset had devised and caused to be constructed with so much labour, and the destruction of which Saint Leger had ordered as a preliminary to his abandonment of the place. The Governor and his secretary had scarcely recovered from the consternation engendered by those alarming explosions when George appeared with the information that they were now free to leave the battery and return to Government House whenever they pleased; and the two Spaniards were still painfully scrambling through and over the débris of the destroyed defences, on their way back to the town, when they saw the Englishmen jump into their boats and push off from the beach.

It was long after sundown on that same day when the anxious watchers on board the *Nonsuch*, anchored in that tiny unsuspected harbour, heard the roll and splash of oars sounding from the seaward of them, and were soon afterward greeted with a hail which told them that their comrades, as to whose safety they were beginning to feel somewhat anxious, were returning; and a few minutes later the boats were alongside and a general reunion had taken place.

It was too late to do anything further that night, apart from the fact that the returned ones were pretty thoroughly tired out by the time that they had shaken down and had their supper; but on the following morning George, Dyer and a guard of two men were landed upon the beach and forthwith proceeded to make the best of their way to the Cimarrone village ruled over by the chief named Lukabela.

As it chanced, the chief was “at home” when they reached the village, and he accorded his visitors a very cordial welcome. He was highly amused and delighted when he learned that the English had held the city of Nombre at their mercy for five days, but looked both puzzled and disgusted when he learned that they had left the place as they found it, without sacking the city, exacting a ransom, or making the Spaniards suffer in any way; for the Cimarrones hated the Spaniards with a hatred that was perfectly fiendish, and woe betide any Spaniard or body of Spaniards whose evil fortune it was to fall into their hands. Death was the least of the evils that any man, woman or child of Spanish blood had to fear at the hands of the ferocious Cimarrones. But he brightened up again when he learned that the young English captain had hatched a particularly audacious scheme, in the execution of which he besought Lukabela’s assistance.

“In anything partaking of the nature of an attack upon the Spaniards, Señor Englishman, you have only to command me, and you may rest assured of the whole-hearted assistance of myself and every man of my tribe,” he assured George.

The latter bowed. “Well,” he explained, “the matter stands thus: A year ago, as you may have heard, certain of my countrymen, among whom was your friend El Draque, were treacherously attacked in the harbour of San Juan de Ulua, and several of them were killed or wounded, while a number of others—among whom was my elder brother—were taken prisoners. Of these last, all have been accounted for in one way or another save seventeen who, I learn, were sent from San Juan to Nombre, and from Nombre to Panama, where I am given to understand they were put aboard the galleys, to end their lives toiling at the oars.

“Now, I and my companions have crossed the Great Water for the express purpose of finding and rescuing my brother—and incidentally his English fellow prisoners—from the Spaniards; and, accordingly, we first went to San Juan, where I learned that the seventeen survivors of the attack had been sent to Nombre. Therefore from San Juan we came to *Nombre*, where I learn that the seventeen were sent to Panama. At my request the Governor of Nombre sent a message to the Governor of Panama, informing the latter that Nombre was in my possession, and that I required the surrender of the seventeen English prisoners as ransom for the town. But the Governor of Panama, instead of finding and returning the Englishmen, has dispatched every soldier from Panama to Nombre, to drive us out of the city. Learning this, and knowing that it would be impossible for us to hold Nombre in the face of the overwhelming force that was being sent against us, I decided to quit the city; but I accompanied the announcement of this determination to the Governor of Nombre with certain threats of return which I believe will cause him to retain those soldiers—the whole garrison of Panama, you understand—in Nombre for a full month, or perhaps longer.

“Panama, you will perceive, is thus left defenceless; and it is my idea to at once make a dash across the isthmus, seize the biggest, or at least the most formidable, ship in the harbour, exact from the Governor, by threats or even force, if possible, full information respecting the galleys aboard which the Englishmen have been shipped, and then go in search of them until I have found them and liberated my countrymen.

“You can help me in this project, if you will, in the following manner. My ship lies at anchor in the little cove of which you know, not far from here. I shall be obliged to leave her there, since I intend to take my entire company with me; and I propose to leave her in your charge. I shall dismantle her, stowing her spars, sails, gear and ordnance below, and roofing her over with a thatch of palm leaves to protect her hull from the sun and weather, and if you will lend me a few of your people, they will be helpful in that part of my work. Then, when that is done, you can further help me by furnishing me with a guide who will lead me to Panama, and by lending me either mules or men who will help me and my people to transport across the isthmus such stores and ammunition as it will be necessary for us to take with us. Will you do this?”

“Señor,” exclaimed Lukabela, “we Cimarrones live but to wreak our righteous vengeance upon the Spaniard. We are his enemies; and you, too, are his enemies; therefore in any attempt of yours which has for its object the spoiling of the Spaniard we are your natural allies, and you may command our help to any extent which you may deem needful. I can place fifty men at your service; and if these be not enough I can increase the number to five hundred in the

course of a week if you care to wait so long.”

“A thousand thanks!” said George. “Your fifty men will no doubt prove ample, for I do not anticipate that there will be any fighting to do, except at sea, and for that my own men will be sufficient. When can I have your men to assist me aboard the ship?”

“I will bring them to you within the hour, señor, if that will suffice,” answered Lukabela.

“Thanks,” answered George, “that will do most admirably. And now, that matter being settled, I will return at once and make all the necessary preparations. The boats shall be waiting to convey you aboard the ship in one hour’s time.”

And therewith he and his party rose and, bidding Lukabela a temporary farewell, hurried back to the *Nonsuch*, where preparations were at once made for the dismantling of the ship prior to the adventurous expedition across the isthmus.

That day and the one that followed it were days of strenuous labour indeed, not only for the crew of the *Nonsuch*, but also for their black allies, who turned up on the beach in full strength, and with most commendable punctuality, under Lukabela, and were promptly taken aboard. For there was a very considerable amount of heavy work to be done: sails were to be loosed and dried, unbent, rolled up and stowed away below; yards and topmasts to be sent down, scraped and thoroughly greased before they, too, were stowed below; gear unrove, overhauled, made up in coils and labelled; the ordnance dismantled, and, in short, the ship dismantled to her three lower masts, and every movable thing stowed away out of reach of covetous hands—for George felt that it would be unwise to trust his black allies too far or too implicitly. Then every anchor and cable belonging to the ship was used to moor her securely, for it was impossible to estimate how long she would have to lie there at the mercy of the elements. And all this had to be done in a small land-locked cove, hemmed-in on every side by high, densely-wooded land, where the trade-wind could not penetrate, and where the land and sea-breezes were represented by merely fitful breathings of suffocatingly hot air drifting by at infrequent intervals. And this, too, with a blazing sun almost immediately overhead; for it was now mid-August, and the cove lay almost immediately under the ninth parallel of north latitude.

Then, when all this was done, there was the fixing up of the framework for a roof or awning of palm-leaf thatch for the protection of the deck and hull of the ship from the sun’s rays; but Lukabela assured George that there was no need to delay the departure of the expedition until the roof had been thatched, for he undertook that the women of his village, who were, according to him, experts in the art of thatching, should attend to that part of the business.

The evening of the second day witnessed the completion of the preparations for the Englishmen’s daring descent upon Panama; and within an hour after sunrise on the following day the entire party, with fifty Cimarrones under Lukabela, and a train of twenty mules, also furnished by the Cimarrone chief, mustered on the beach of the little secret cove and made their final preparations for the march. These merely consisted in loading the indispensable baggage of the party upon the mules; and as this work was performed by the deft hands of the Cimarrones, twenty minutes sufficed for the accomplishment of the task, when the expedition at once started, taking the way, in the first instance, toward Lukabela’s village.

Until the adventurers reached the village the march was accomplished in a very loose and happy-go-lucky fashion, half the Cimarrones leading the way, with the Englishmen following in small chattering parties of twos and threes as the path through the bush would permit, while the mule train, in charge of the other half of the Cimarrones, brought up the rear. But with their departure from the village silence and strict military discipline became the order of the day, because although Lukabela was going to lead them, not by the Gold road, upon which they would be liable to encounter travellers at any moment, but by a devious and secret path, known only to the Cimarrones, they would still



THE ROUTE LAY ALMOST ENTIRELY THROUGH DENSE, LOFTY FOREST.  
*The Cruise of the "Nonsuch,"* p. 36.

be passing through the enemy's country, and would be liable to detection unless the utmost caution was observed. Therefore the order of march was thus arranged: In the lead went, as guide and scout, fully armed with bow and spear, the Cimarrone who of the whole tribe was most intimately acquainted with the route which was to be followed. Then, in single file, distant from each other about fifty yards, went five other Cimarrones in the track of the leader, their duty being to watch for and transmit to the main body any signals which the leader might make. Then, some fifty yards in the rear of the rearmost of these five, marched twenty Cimarrones whose duty it would be to make a stand should the enemy by any chance appear in force, while the main body retired upon the nearest defensive position. Fifty yards to the rear again followed the aforesaid main body, consisting of half the Englishmen, the mule train, and the other half of the Englishmen, while the remainder of the Cimarrones constituted the rear guard.

The route lay almost entirely through dense, lofty forest, and wound hither and thither in the most bewildering fashion; for in addition to the giant trees which constituted the forest proper, there was a vast quantity of thick, tangled undergrowth, through which a man might indeed have forced his way with difficulty, but which was absolutely impassable for laden mules; therefore it was necessary to follow the sinuosities of the thinner parts of the jungle where a few occasional strokes of a machete were all that were required to enable the laden animals to pass. Under such circumstances progress was necessarily slow, and also fatiguing; but the Englishmen forgot not only the snail-like nature of their progress, but also the oppressive heat and fatigue of the march, for they were now in a new and wonderful world, more strange and beautiful than anything that the most fanciful imagination among them had ever pictured. To men like themselves, seamen, accustomed day after day, for months at a time, to the sight of the open sky, the boundless sea, the invigorating breath of the salt wind, and the feeling of a heaving deck beneath their feet, it was a novelty to be trudging upon firm ground along a forest path, enveloped in the mystery of soft green twilight, with dense masses of foliage overhead shutting out all sight of the sky except at infrequent intervals, their horizon bounded by the leafy brake within arm's reach of them on either hand, and to breathe the hot, close atmosphere of the woods, pungent with many strange odours; to listen to the silence of the forest, accentuated rather than broken by the sounds of their passage, and the low singing hum of innumerable myriads of invisible insects; to start as a sudden whirr of wings directed their attention to some brilliant plumaged bird seen for an instant flashing athwart their ken like a living gem and then vanishing they scarcely knew whither; to behold the countless strange forms and curious colours of the flowers that sprang beneath their feet or hung in festoons from the lofty branches overhead; to hear the mysterious sounds that occasionally came to them from the forest on either hand; and to slake their thirst by devouring the strange but luscious fruits indicated by their friends the Cimarrones and partaken of at first doubtfully and with extremest caution. And it was only when they suddenly emerged from the forest gloom into some brake open to the sky, and halted for a moment until their eyes grew accustomed to the dazzling daylight, that they were able to realise how intense that gloom had been. But the novelty of the journey was not all pleasurable, for apart from the breathless, oppressive heat, and the annoyance caused by the pertinacious attacks of mosquitos, gnats, and other fiercely stinging insects, there was a certain element of danger, as was manifested by the frequent low warning cry raised by a Cimarrone, of "*Culebra, culebra; guardarse!*" (snake, snake; beware!)

It was close upon noon when, after a gentle ascent of about four hours' duration, followed by a somewhat steeper descent of rather less than half that time the expedition emerged from the forest and found itself in a small, open, grassy space, bordered on the one hand by the high woods and on the other by a small stream of crystal clear water flowing over a gravelly bed; and here Lukabela gave the welcome announcement that he proposed to call a halt for two hours in order that men and animals might rest and refresh themselves during the hottest part of the day. Accordingly arms were piled, armour put off, and most of the Englishmen indulged in the unwonted luxury of a fresh



water bath, while the faithful Cimarrones—or Maroons, as some of the mariners began to call them—unloaded the mules, watered them, and then hobbled them to feed upon the rich, short grass, lighted a fire, cut down sweet, balsam-like boughs and built little arbours with them in the shadow of which their white friends might sleep. And when, after a refreshing bath and a still more refreshing sleep, the Englishmen were awakened about two o'clock, behold! those faithful and indefatigable allies the Cimarrones had provided a delicious hot meal for their delectation, consisting of the choicest portions of two freshly-killed deer, which, having been first wrapped in clay, were afterwards baked in the embers of the fire, thus completely retaining all the natural juices of the meat and rendering it incomparably delicate, tender and tasty. Then, the meal finished, the Cimarrones—always the Cimarrones—produced certain dried golden-brown leaves, which they deftly fashioned into *cigarros* for the delectation of themselves and such of the Englishmen as were adventurous enough to test the seductive effects of tobacco; and when the *cigarros* had duly been done justice to the mules were rounded up, loaded, the order of march arranged, and the journey resumed.

The afternoon march was, in all essential respects, similar to that of the morning, and continued until about five o'clock in the evening, when another open, grassy glade, very similar to that of the noontide halt, was reached, and here Lukabela announced his intention of halting for the night. Then occurred a repetition of the principal events of the previous halt, except that after the Englishmen had bathed to their satisfaction they found a hot meal awaiting them without the preliminary of the two hours' sleep. As before, the meal was followed by *cigarros*, accompanied by a little desultory conversation; but this did not continue long, for the Englishmen, at least, were dead weary with their unwonted labours, and one after another they stretched themselves out where they sat and, careless of the saturating dew, at once sank into dreamless slumber, surrounded by their faithful allies, four of whom kept watch over the sleeping camp until another day dawned. And so the march continued day after day with little variation, sometimes climbing upward and at other times descending, but on the whole the tendency was distinctly to rise.

Toward the close of the third day, and in a still more marked degree during the fourth day of their march, the breaks in the forest became more frequent, and of greater extent, occasionally permitting them to get a glimpse of their more immediate surroundings, when it became apparent, as might indeed be judged by the up-and-down character of the way which they had already traversed, that they were in the midst of hilly country, a dip in the forest occasionally revealing a blue peak breaking the sky-line in the far distance. And when they halted at mid-day on the fourth day it was in a glade that formed part of the very crest of a mountain spur, so that, even as they partook of their mid-day meal they were able to look out over a vast extent of country both ahead of and behind them. In the latter direction they saw mile after mile of undulating woods stretching away into the distance, the outline gradually softening and the infinite variety of green tints gradually merging into filmy grey; and beyond it the Caribbean shimmering beneath the tropic sun; while ahead of them, to the south-east, and almost within a stone's throw, as it seemed, rose a lofty ridge, which Lukabela informed George was the backbone of the range, from the summit of which could be seen Panama and that—to Englishmen—almost fabulous ocean, the Southern Sea, the very existence of which the Spaniards were guarding as a priceless secret.

But, near as that ridge looked from their mid-day camping-place, it was not reached until the evening of the fifth day of their march; and then, after toiling up a steep slope for half an hour, the party topped it, and a sudden shout of exultation burst from their throats as, standing in a little glade, they looked out over the tree-tops of the intervening forest and saw first another but much lower ridge, with a mountain valley between it and them, and beyond that ridge, and only some ten miles distant, the white towers and buildings of Panama nestling beside a river which discharged into its harbour, the harbour itself dotted with a few ships, and beyond it again the great, boundless, mystic Southern Sea, at the sight of which George and his crew, like the pious Christian mariners that they were, incontinently fell upon their knees and gave God thanks, vowing at the same time that by His grace they would sail those waters until they had recovered the lost ones of whom they were in search—or had fearfully avenged their death.

And now it became necessary to exercise the most extreme caution, for, so far as was known, there were no Indians within twenty miles of Panama, save a few "tame" ones who had been permitted to establish themselves within some four miles of the city, and who made a living by growing vegetables and fruit and rearing poultry for the Panama market; the country all round about within a radius of a dozen miles or so had therefore come to be regarded as practically as safe as the streets of the city itself, and hawking parties were of frequent occurrence among the magnates of Panama. And to encounter one of these parties would be to inevitably give the alarm to the citizens, which, strong as the English felt themselves to be, was a consummation to be carefully avoided; wherefore, having gazed their fill upon the glorious prospect before them, the party retired along the way by which they had come, until they reached a spot where they had already decided to camp; and there they spent the night. The journey down into the plain was accomplished on the following day with the utmost circumspection, not only because every step which they now took led to the danger of detection by some party of sportsmen, or solitary fowler, but also because the "tame" Indians had to be reckoned with; and it was known that these were in the habit of wandering far up the slopes of the Cordilleras in search of game and of the fruit that grew wild in rich abundance in certain of the woods. Moreover, the time had now arrived when a definite plan of action of some sort must be determined upon, since this would largely influence the manner of their approach to the city and their subsequent actions. Therefore as soon as the party had once more topped the ridge upon which they had stood entranced for half an hour during the previous evening young Saint Leger called a halt and, flinging himself down upon the grass, produced his perspective glass—or telescope, as we now call the much improved instrument—and with its assistance subjected the town and roadstead to a prolonged and careful examination. The result of this examination, and of a conference with his officers which was simultaneously conducted, was that the resolution was made to capture a certain caravel which was seen to be riding at anchor in the roadstead and which appeared to be the best suited to their requirements of any of the ships then in sight; and, having secured possession of her, to threaten the town with destruction by her guns until all the information required from the Governor had been abstracted from him; after which the only thing remaining to be done would be to sail in search of the galleys containing the English prisoners, and capture them when found. It was an audacious scheme, for Panama was the biggest and most important city on the continent at that time, and, apart from the question of soldiers, the citizens alone if they chose to arm themselves and fight were

sufficiently numerous to overwhelm the English; but George had by that time learned to gauge the courage of the American Spaniard pretty accurately, and he felt that the undertaking which he had planned, although difficult, was by no means beyond his power to accomplish.

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## Chapter Sixteen.

### How they took the great galleon.

In order to obtain possession of the caravel which George had marked down as his prey, boats were necessary, since the vessel lay at anchor in the roadstead, instead of alongside the wharf; and to obtain boats it would be necessary to enter the city. But Panama, like Nombre and San Juan, and indeed all the Spanish settlements in America, was fortified on the landward side as a protection against the incursions of the savages who, gentle enough when the white man first came among them, soon had their most ferocious and bloodthirsty instincts fully aroused by the heartless cruelty and treachery with which the Spaniards quickly began to treat them; to enter the city from its landward side was therefore impossible for the English without at once betraying themselves and something of their purpose. The only alternative, therefore, was to gain an entrance from the water; and the problem was how to do this without betraying themselves and putting the inhabitants on their guard.

At first the difficulty seemed to be insurmountable, but George Saint Leger was one of those who refuse to acknowledge anything as impossible; and at length, when the party had halted at mid-day behind the very last screen of timber between them and the city, he believed he had discovered the answer to his problem.

It has been said that Panama stood not only on the shore of the ocean but also on the left bank of a small stream which, taking its rise somewhere among the adjacent mountains, discharged itself into the waters of the harbour, and when once it had come to be recognised that the approach of the party must be made by water, it was upon this stream that George concentrated his attention. It was but an insignificant affair as to width, and to all appearance shallow, but just before it reached the city it widened out to about sixty yards across; and while the young captain was studying it through his perspective glass, during the mid-day halt, he perceived a few boats and canoes plying hither and thither upon that portion of it which flowed past the town. Also, while he was watching, his attention was attracted to two figures in the plain below; and by bringing his glass to bear upon them he was able to distinguish that the leading figure was a Spaniard carrying what appeared to be a hawk upon his wrist, while the individual who followed him was either an Indian or a negro, he could not distinguish which, but he saw that this person was carrying something suspended from a pole over his shoulder, which looked like and doubtless was a bunch of dead birds. The pair walked straight to the margin of the stream, about three-quarters of a mile above the city, the stream being at that point about twenty yards wide, and when the Spaniard reached the margin he halted, turned and said something to his follower, at the same time pointing to the ground, whereupon the black carefully deposited the pole and its burden upon the ground, then stooped low, and allowed the Spaniard to seat himself astride upon his shoulders. Then, rising to his feet with his burden, the black stepped into the stream, waded across, deposited the Spaniard upon the bank, and, as the latter strode off towards the town, returned, picked up his load, waded across again, and followed the footsteps of his master. Now, there was nothing *very* remarkable about this, but there were *two* points connected with it which attracted George's notice, one of them being that when the black stepped into the stream with his master upon his shoulders, a single stride sufficed to carry him into water deep enough to submerge him to his waist, and that depth was maintained all the way across until within about two yards of the bank. The other point which George considered worthy of note was that about a hundred yards below the point where those two persons had crossed the stream, there grew a clump of bamboos sufficiently large to screen the entire party from observation, if they could reach it undetected by people in the town. He called Lukabela to him, told him what he had seen, explained the scheme that had developed in his mind while watching the passage of the two men across the stream, and finally indicated the clump of bamboo, asking whether there was any possibility of reaching it after dark without being detected. The Cimarrone thereupon studied the features of the country below and around him long and intently, and at length answered in the affirmative, pointing out the route which it would be necessary to follow, and then, after a little further pregnant conversation, the two rose and returned to where the rest of the party lay *perdu*.

In conversation with Lukabela, George had already learned from the Cimarrone that, from information derived by the latter from certain runaway slaves, the citizens of Panama were somewhat addicted to the keeping of late hours, as late hours were counted in those days, that is to say, the more gay and pleasure-loving of the Panamans rarely thought of seeking their couches before midnight; Saint Leger, therefore, determined to remain where he was until that hour in order that his arrival in the city might be deferred until its roysterers were all safely in bed and asleep; also, there was in all probability a somewhat strenuous time before the Englishmen, and some unlikelihood as to when they might reckon upon another night's undisturbed rest; upon his return to camp, therefore, George issued an order that every man was to compose himself to rest and get as much sleep as possible, the only breaks in these periods of rest being at the appointed meal times. But the young captain had by this time become wise in the art of warfare, consequently he took the precaution to protect his camp from surprise by throwing out strong pickets of Cimarrones in every direction from which surprise could possibly come; and, this done, the expedition composed itself to rest.

It was about five o'clock in the evening that George was awakened by a light touch upon his shoulder, and, springing up, he found Lukabela bending over him with his finger to his lips.

"What is it, chief?" demanded George in a whisper.

"Come and see," replied the Cimarrone in an equally guarded tone of voice; whereupon George arose and, led by the black, noiselessly quitted the sleeping camp and made his way to a small knoll in the open, commanding a fairly comprehensive view of the city and roadstead.

As the pair crept cautiously to the summit of the knoll and peered over it, Lukabela pointed with his finger and murmured "Behold!" And, looking in the direction toward which the chief was pointing, George beheld a noble and stately galleon standing in toward the anchorage with ensigns and pennons flying from her mastheads, and with a large galley acting as escort to her. The galleon was an exceptionally large vessel, being, as Saint Leger estimated, of fully five hundred tons measurement. She showed a double tier of ordnance, besides sakers, falcons, falconettes and serpentes on her poop and fore and after castles. She was painted a deep golden yellow, with broad white bands along her two tiers of gun ports, and there was, in accordance with the Spanish fashion of the times, a tremendous amount of decorative gilding about her bows and quarters; her sails also were decorated with paintings, though what subjects were represented it was impossible to distinguish at that distance.

"A plate ship, loaded with silver from Lima, without a doubt," whispered Lukabela. "I saw her appear round yonder headland about half an hour ago, and I thought you would be interested."

"I am," replied George emphatically, bringing his glass to bear upon the craft, and he watched her as she gradually drifted in toward the anchorage, while Lukabela kept a look-out to guard against their being surprised by passers by.

Slow and stately the great galleon crept toward the roadstead, impelled by the dying sea-breeze, and at length, as the wind dropped altogether and the waters of the bay became a flawless mirror reflecting the gorgeous tints of a flaming sunset, she dropped her ponderous anchor about half a mile from the shore; her gaily painted sails were slowly clewed up and furled; the galley went alongside and received several richly dressed persons from the galleon, including some three or four in full suits of armour, and then pushed off and pulled toward the quay, churning the placid waters of the bay into foam with the long, regular strokes of her sixty oars, finally ranging up alongside and mooring to the wharf, when the passengers from the galleon and some twenty other persons, who were probably the officers of the galley, landed and disappeared among the streets of the city.

Then George Saint Leger arose from his place of concealment among the long grass at the summit of the knoll, thinking deeply, and made his way back to the camp, accompanied by the Cimarrone chief. As they entered the camp George turned to his black companion and said:

"My thanks to you, Lukabela, for arousing me. The sight you showed me was well worth looking at. Please God, before twelve hours are past that ship and her cargo shall be mine; ay, and the galley too. For who knows but that somebody aboard her may be able to give me news of my brother."

The great bell of Panama cathedral was booming out the hour of midnight, and its sonorous strokes came floating slowly and subdued by distance to the camp of the English adventurers as the sturdy band, having partaken of a hearty supper, formed up into marching order prior to leaving their place of concealment. A strong scouting party of Cimarrones had been thrown forward in advance to guard against surprise, and as George completed his inspection of weapons and equipment the cry of a nightjar coming from the extreme distance and repeated ever nearer by the line of scouts told that the way was clear and that the column might begin its advance.

There is no need to describe, step by step, the sinuous passage through the long grass of that band of intrepid adventurers toward the clump of bamboos which was to be their rallying point; they knew that danger encompassed them on every hand, and that the most trivial accident might result in their premature discovery and, possibly the ruin of all their plans, yet they pressed forward steadily and unflinchingly, trusting implicitly in the wisdom of their leaders and the sagacity of their black allies, and in about three-quarters of an hour arrived safely at the point for which they were aiming, without the occurrence of the slightest disconcerting incident of any description.

Here, completely screened from observation by the sheltering clump of bamboos, the blacks at once proceeded to unload the pack mules and stack their loads in close proximity to the river bank. And while this was being done, George, Dyer, and twelve of the most reliable of the Englishmen calmly laid aside their weapons, armour, and all clothing, and at a signal from their captain, crept crouchingly round the shoulder of the bamboo clump to the river margin where, after heads had been counted to see that none was missing, the whole party noiselessly entered the water, waded out to mid stream, and then, following their leader, proceeded to swim silently and with deliberation toward the city. There was a moon, in her first quarter, shining brightly almost directly overhead, which afforded ample light for the party to see where they were going, while a soft mist hung over the river and the low ground about the city, which to a certain extent concealed their movements.

George was careful not to hurry himself or his followers, for, in the first place, they were a full quarter of an hour earlier than they expected, and he did not wish to reach the city until he could be reasonably sure that its inhabitants were all abed and asleep, and in the next place he was anxious to conserve his own and his followers' strength as far as possible, knowing that many heavy demands would be made upon it before long; he therefore paddled very quietly along, hardly exerting himself at all and allowing the current to carry him cityward. Thus the hour of one boomed out from the cathedral while they were still a quarter of a mile from the inner extremity of the quay for which they were aiming.

At length, however, drifting for the most part, and only swimming a stroke or two occasionally to guide themselves, they reached the extremity of the wharf, where they found a flight of steps at which they landed. Here, in obedience to an order from George, the remainder of the party crouched well below the level of the quay, while their leader cautiously climbed the steps to reconnoitre. A single glance sufficed to show that the whole length of the quay in sight—nearly half a mile—was deserted, while not a light was to be seen in any direction. This latter circumstance, however, was presently accounted for by the fact that all the buildings facing the wharf were evidently warehouses, for the most part one-storey buildings with broad verandahs reaching out before them, undoubtedly for the purpose of protecting the workers from the terrific heat of the mid-day sun. Now, however, under the moon's rays, those verandahs, many of them cumbered with bales and cases of merchandise, cast a deep, almost opaque shadow, of which George instantly determined to avail himself; therefore, beckoning to his followers, he made a dash across the staring moon-lighted quay to the nearest verandah, and in less than three minutes all hands were huddled in the

deep shadow of a pile of bales.

Thus far all had gone well, they were actually in the city of Panama, with never a soul a penny the wiser; and George felt that, having accomplished so much, it would be strange indeed if he could not carry the whole of his plans to fruition. But, great as their peril had been already, that peril had, after all, been merely that of discovery; now it was infinitely greater, for there they were, fourteen naked Englishmen, unarmed save for a knife which each carried in a sheath strapped to his waist, in a hostile city where, if they should be caught, they might be certain of either the galleys—or worse still—the Inquisition. Meanwhile, however, there seemed little immediate fear of either as George peered out from his hiding-place and intently scanned the length of the quay. As has been said, not a single living thing was visible, but there were several craft moored alongside, small vessels mostly, such as coasters, fishing craft, and lighters; but probably a portion at least of the crews of these craft lived and slept aboard them, and a restless man coming up on deck for a breath of fresh air at an inopportune moment might suffice to ruin everything.

Cautiously George emerged from his place of concealment, flitted across the width of the quay, and peered over its edge. He looked down upon three clumsy, half-decked fishing craft, apparently deserted, but quite unfit for his purpose. Beyond them was a tier of heavy lighters moored three abreast, with nobody aboard them, and beyond them a small coasting craft with hatches on, and her cabin and forecastle doors, as well as her skylights, closed. Nobody aboard her, certainly. Glancing around him, and signalling his unseen companions to follow him up, he ran along the edge of the quay until he had passed the coaster, when he found himself close to several tiers of lighters, all moored three abreast, beyond which were two small coasters, moored one outside the other, then more lighters, and a whole crowd of fishing craft. Swiftly George sped along past these, glancing continually about him to assure himself that he was unobserved and that his people were following him, and at length he came to where a large caravel was lying moored to the quay, with all her boats in the water alongside her. Here was what he wanted at last, and pausing but an instant to beckon his companions, he sprang from the quay into the vessel's main rigging, and from thence noiselessly made his way to her deck. Less than half a minute later his thirteen companions stood beside him.

Collecting his followers round him with a wave of his hand, Saint Leger rapidly issued his instructions. He had already satisfied himself that the boats alongside contained everything that he required in the way of equipment, therefore, all that was necessary was to take possession of them and get away from the parent craft without alarming any of the crew who, he judged from certain evidence, were asleep below—therefore at the conclusion of his few brief orders his followers slid one after the other down the side of the caravel into the boats, taking the utmost care to make no sound, and when they were all down, George cast off the painters, one after the other, and dropped their ends into the hands outstretched to receive them, finally climbing down into the largest boat and signing to his followers to shove off. This was done with the bare hands, hence there was no rattle of oars, nor even the faintest splash of water, for once adrift, the boats were carried slowly down the harbour by the current.

There were four boats in all, the largest being the caravel's pinnace, a craft pulling twelve oars, and the other three boats were made fast in a string behind her. But these four boats were insufficient for George's purpose, since they would accommodate scarcely three-quarters of his entire party, with their baggage, weapons, and ammunition, therefore other craft were needed, and these they at once proceeded to look out for as the boats drifted slowly to seaward. The drift was exceedingly slow, much too slow indeed for George's impatience, and he commented upon it in a whisper to Dyer who was sitting in the stern sheets beside him. The pilot looked about him for a moment and then, whispering back, hazarded the opinion that the tide was about to turn, if indeed it had not already done so, and that the young flood would be setting up the harbour within the next half-hour, indicating his reasons for arriving at such a conclusion. This, and the fact that a light south-easterly breeze was beginning to make itself felt, suggested an idea to the young captain which he communicated to Dyer, and the latter approving, they decided to adopt it at the earliest opportunity. And that opportunity was not long in coming, for they had scarcely drifted a quarter of a mile down the harbour when they came abreast of a large building opposite which some forty or fifty boats of all sizes were moored, some of them being rowing boats while others were rigged for sailing. Using a pair of oars paddle-wise, the little flotilla of boats was skilfully guided toward these, and a few minutes later they were alongside and made fast. Three good roomy boats were quickly chosen from among these and secured, and then the whole seven were secured together in a string. Then one of the larger sailing-boats was cast adrift, the string of rowing boats, each with a man in her, was made fast astern, and the sailing-boat was pushed off. And now came what was perhaps the most critical moment of the enterprise; for although they had thus far seen no one there was no doubt that many men were sleeping aboard the various craft in the harbour, and the slightest suspicious sound might awaken somebody and at once cause an alarm to be raised. Still, a certain amount of risk had to be run, and George decided to take it at once. The sailing-boat was therefore skilfully manoeuvred to the middle of the harbour, her bows turned up stream by a few quick strokes of an oar, and then, with the observance of the utmost precaution, her single sail was set with only a very slight momentary rustling of the loosened canvas. A few seconds later the halyard was made fast, the sheet was trimmed aft, and the boat, with the string of seven in tow astern, began to move slowly and silently up the stream.

To George it seemed as though that short voyage would never end, for by the time that they had secured the full number of boats required, the adventurers had drifted nearly a mile down the harbour, and the whole of that distance, and something more, had to be retraced before they could consider themselves safe from discovery, while it was practically certain that if so much as a single person should get sight of them the alarm would at once be raised; for the spectacle of a sailing-boat with seven rowing boats in tow proceeding up the river at that hour would be sufficiently remarkable to instantly arouse suspicion. But after some twenty-five minutes of tense anxiety the little flotilla rounded a bend in the stream and the worst of the danger was past, while another twenty minutes brought them up abreast the bamboo clump where their comrades and the Cimarrones were anxiously awaiting them.

And now all was bustle and activity; the boats were brought alongside the bank of the stream, and while their captors scrambled ashore and hastily resumed their clothing, armour, and weapons, the other contingent, assisted by the Cimarrones, carefully stowed their belongings in varying proportions in the several row-boats. By the time that this was done, their companions were once more clothed, and all was ready for a start. Then fervent farewells were

exchanged between the English and the Cimarrones, Lukabela faithfully promising to keep an eye upon the *Nonsuch* and see that nothing untoward happened to her during the absence of her crew, while George on his part as faithfully promised that, upon his return, his faithful allies should be munificently rewarded for the very valuable assistance which they had rendered. After the Cimarrones had unwillingly departed, George mustered and inspected his followers, satisfied himself that all were present and that their weapons were in good order and ready for instant service, made them a good rousing speech—in response to which they were with difficulty restrained from cheering, and finally told them off, one by one, to the particular boat in which each man was to go. The boats were now all arranged in a string, as before, in tow of the sailing-boat, and, with the crews lying *perdu* in the bottom of their respective craft, the entire expedition got under way and proceeded down the river.

Meanwhile, the weather had undergone a certain change. The wind which an hour earlier had scarcely sufficed the sailing-boat, with the row-boats in tow, to stem the current of the stream, was now piping up a merry breeze, fresh enough to drive the flotilla along at a speed of fully three knots, while heavy masses of cloud were sweeping up from the south-east, obscuring the moon for frequent and lengthening intervals, both of which circumstances were in the adventurers' favour. Despite the fact that the tide was now distinctly against them, the flotilla made such excellent progress that within half an hour of starting they were again abreast of the town, hugging the face of the quay as closely as possible in order to reduce their chances of detection. Half-way down the harbour they passed a galley—undoubtedly the galley which had served as escort to the galleon in the roadstead—moored alongside the quay, and George felt sorely tempted to dash alongside and take possession of her. But there was scarcely one chance in a thousand that this could have been done without raising an alarm of some sort; it was too much to hope that a surprise should be so complete that no shout should be raised by any one of her startled crew, no shot fired, no clash of weapons disturb the silence of the night; and an alarm at this stage of the proceedings would ruin the whole of his carefully laid plans therefore, although the young captain gazed long and wistfully at the formidable-looking craft as he swept past, he bit his lips and kept silence, holding the bows of the sailing-boat now pointed steadily toward the distant galleon.

At this moment a great black cloud drifted up athwart the half-moon, shutting off her light and causing a darkness to fall upon the scene that, for a few seconds and until the eye grew accustomed to it, seemed almost Egyptian in its intensity, while the breeze freshened to such an extent as to careen the sailing-boat gunwale-to and nearly double her speed through the water. Her slight timbers creaked and groaned with the increased pressure put upon them by the heavy drag of the boats in tow, and Dyer laid his hand apprehensively upon the painter of the leading boat, strained as taut as a bar; but it was no time for vacillation, the obscurity and the increased strength of the wind were almost worth men's lives at such a moment, and George, who was tending the boat's mainsheet, hung on to every inch of it, like grim death. Once, as they went foaming close past a cluster of small traders, moored three abreast alongside the quay, just as his eyes were becoming accustomed to the sudden darkness, George thought he saw a man's head suddenly appear above the rail of one of them, and was almost certain that a moment later he heard a faint hail, but he took no notice of it beyond inquiring of Dyer whether he had heard anything—to which the pilot replied in the negative; and five minutes later they were clear of the harbour and all danger of detection was for the moment at an end.

The galleon, tall and stately, was now distinctly visible, riding head to wind, with a single anchor down, her three poop lanterns lighted, and a lantern glimmering under the heel of her spritsail mast and straight toward her sped the flotilla of boats, threshing through the short, choppy sea raised by the freshening breeze and throwing the spray in heavy showers over their crews. George, no longer afraid of his voice being heard, hailed the crew of the leading boat, ordering them to protect the priming of their weapons from the spray, and to pass the caution along the line, and then directed his attention to the galleon.

Another quarter of a mile, and the time for action had come. With a warning shout to the boats astern, he gave orders for the sail to be lowered, and a minute later he and his crew had transferred themselves to the largest row-boat, the sailing-boat that had served them so well was cast adrift, the painters were cast off, and the boats, each now a separate entity, formed in line abreast and, with muffled oars, gave way for the galleon, their crews not hurrying themselves but pulling a long, steady stroke that enabled them to husband their strength for the struggle that probably lay before them.

Shaping a course that would carry them about a hundred yards ahead of the galleon, the flotilla, as soon as they reached this point, separated into two divisions, larboard and starboard, and turning head to wind, laid in their oars, all but a single pair to each boat, and while the men manipulating these two oars guided their respective craft in such a manner as to cause them to drive gently down before the wind and sea alongside the galleon, the remainder of the boats' crews looked to their weapons and made ready to climb the vessel's lofty sides, intently watching meanwhile for any indication that their approach had been detected by the Spaniard's crew. But nothing was seen, no warning shout was heard, no head showed peering curiously over the head rails, in fact everything seemed to point to the fact that the watch was asleep, if indeed a watch was being kept at all, which the Spaniards would be likely to regard as quite unnecessary in waters where hitherto no enemy had ever appeared.

A few minutes more of patient, carefully managed drifting, and the boats were skilfully manoeuvred alongside, one after the other, and then, at a low whistle from the young captain, the adventurers went swarming up the towering sides of the galleon, as noiselessly as a drifting mist wreath, and in over the lofty bulwarks, in the shadow of which they formed up, bare-footed, as they came. Within a minute all hands, with their scanty baggage, were out of the boats, and the latter were cast adrift, while thus far not a Spaniard had been seen. Then, choosing half a dozen men to follow him, and directing Dyer and Basset to form the remainder into a strong guard over the hatchways, George led the way aft into the poop cabins.

The first apartment visited was the grand saloon, a fine, spacious, lofty apartment of the full width of the ship, most sumptuously furnished and decorated, lighted during the day by three large ports on either side, and a skylight overhead—all now open to admit the comparatively cool night wind—and during the night by a large and very handsome silver lamp suspended from the beams. That lamp was now burning, but turned low; and George's first act

was to turn it up so that he might have the advantage of its full illumination to look about him. The walls and bulkheads were decorated with a number of pictures that to the eye of the unsophisticated young Englishman looked no more than merely pleasing representations of landscapes and shipping, but several of them bore as signatures names that are now world famous, while some of the paintings which Saint Leger regarded as hardly worthy of a second glance to-day adorn picture galleries, the contents of which are reckoned of incalculable value. The furniture was elegantly carved and richly gilt, the upholstery was of velvet and silk; a guitar gaily decorated with ribbons lay where it had been carelessly placed upon one of the divans, with a pair of beautifully embroidered gloves near it; and the after-bulkhead supported a splendid trophy of weapons, conspicuous among which was a magnificent sword with a gold hilt and a Toledo blade elegantly damascened in gold.

A door in this bulkhead showed that there was another apartment on the other side of it, and to this door George strode and, sword in hand, flung it open, holding himself ready for a sudden attack by the occupant. But the room—which was a large state-room, as handsomely furnished as the grand saloon—was untenanted; and then George suddenly remembered that upon the arrival of the galleon he had seen several people leave her in the galley, and it now began to dawn upon him that those people must undoubtedly have been the captain and principal officers of the ship, who, in accordance with the Spanish fashion of the times, had no doubt regarded their duty as at an end with the letting go of the anchor, and had accordingly gone ashore to celebrate the successful completion of the voyage. And so upon further inspection it proved, not a single officer of any description being found in the after part of the ship, which, by the way, proved to be named the *Cristobal Colon*. As regards the remainder of the crew, a cautious reconnoitre revealed the fact that they were all sleeping more or less soundly in their stifling quarters on the lower deck, and this ascertained, it was not difficult to arouse them by a sudden call of “All hands on deck!” They came, stumbling, grumbling, execrating, and still more than half asleep, up through the hatchways, and as they came, unarmed, they were carefully herded upon the fore part of the deck where, when all hands of them had appeared, they were placed under the guard of a strong body of Englishmen armed with loaded muskets, and told with pithy succinctness that the first man who attempted to move without orders would be shot down. Then, led by Dyer and Basset, a small party of Englishmen went below and made a thorough search of the ship, securing everything in the shape of a weapon that they could find, after which a large store-room below was hastily cleared out, and the Spanish crew temporarily but securely confined therein.

And thus, without the shedding of a single drop of blood, George Saint Leger and his sturdy Devonians came into possession of the biggest galleon then afloat on the Pacific at the moment when she bore the richest cargo that had ever left Lima in a single bottom.

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## Chapter Seventeen.

### How they fought the galley.

By the time that all had been made secure aboard the galleon it was within an hour and a half of sunrise, and Saint Leger knew from his own feelings that his followers must be beginning to experience the fatiguing efforts of their strenuous and exciting night's work; he therefore told off four of the most trustworthy of the men to observe an anchor watch, under Dyer, and ordered the remainder of the crew to go below and snatch a couple of hours' rest, that they might be the better fitted to cope with the events of the coming day, which might well be of such a character as to tax their energies to the utmost. Then, accompanied by William Barker the gunner, and two men bearing lighted lanterns, he went below to inspect the ship's magazine—the keys of which he had found in the captain's state-room—and to take stock of the nature and quantity of the ammunition therein. This was found to be abundant, the magazine being indeed packed full of powder and matches, while a generous supply of shot of all descriptions, including bar and chain, was discovered in the adjacent shot lockers, much to the young captain's relief, for his chief anxiety had been lest, after having taken the galleon, he should find himself hampered by a lack of the means to keep her. As for small arms, such as arquebuses, pistols, pikes, axes, swords, bows—long and cross—arrows, and bolts, a full supply for a much stronger crew than his own had already been found, irrespective of the well-tried weapons which they had brought with them across the isthmus. George's mind was therefore now at rest, so far as matters of the greatest importance were concerned; he therefore concluded his inspection and returned to the deck, easy in mind and greatly elated at the wonderful success which had thus far attended his bold dash upon Panama.

The new day was heralded by the sudden appearance of a fleet of some seventy or eighty fishing-boats and canoes coming out of the harbour and hastening toward the fishing grounds in the offing. Several of these small craft passed quite close to the galleon, and the sight of them inspired George with an idea. Making his way from the poop down into the grand saloon, he rummaged about until he found writing materials, when he sat down at the table and after some consideration penned the following letter:

“On board the galleon *Cristobal Colon*.

“August 19th, in the year of Our Lord 1569.

“To his Excellency Don Silvio Hermoso Maria Picador

“Calderon,

“Governor of the City of Panama, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

“Illustrious Señor.

“On the fourth day of this present month I arrived at the city of Nombre de Dios upon a mission the purpose of which was to secure the release of seventeen Englishmen who were last year made prisoners in the course of a treacherous

and unjustifiable attack upon the fleet of Admiral Hawkins while, in pursuance of an agreement between himself and His Excellency Don Martin Enriquez, the Viceroy of Mexico, he was refitting his ships.

"I have traced those seventeen prisoners in the first instance from San Juan de Ulua to Nombre de Dios; and upon my arrival at Nombre I was informed by His Excellency Don Sebastian de Albareda, the Governor of the city, that they had been dispatched to Panama. Whereupon, at my request, Don Sebastian was so obliging as to address a letter to Your Excellency, informing you of the purpose of my visit, and requesting you to take whatever steps might be necessary to secure the immediate release of those seventeen Englishmen and their surrender to me.

"In due course Don Sebastian received your reply to his letter, and that reply he permitted me to read. From it I regretfully learned that Your Excellency categorically refused to accede to Don Sebastian's most reasonable request, notwithstanding the fact that the city of Nombre was then in my hands and at my mercy, and that, for all you knew to the contrary, your refusal would involve it in all the horrors of sack and destruction.

"Your Excellency, I am not so inhumane as to punish the innocent for the faults of the guilty, therefore since Don Sebastian had obviously done everything in his power to further the success of my mission, and had failed, not through his own fault but because of your obstinacy, I spared Nombre, and determined to try what personal persuasion might effect with yourself. Accompanied by my followers, I set out for Panama, where we arrived last night. And in the early hours of this morning I took the first step toward reaching satisfactory terms with Your Excellency by capturing the *Cristobal Colon*, now riding at anchor in Panama roadstead.

"No doubt Your Excellency is well acquainted with the galleon and the possibilities which she affords to a determined captain backed by a strong and courageous crew. If, however, Your Excellency chances to be ignorant as to those possibilities—which I can scarcely believe—her captain, who, as I understand, is at present in your city, will doubtless inform you that her armament is sufficiently powerful and complete to destroy Panama in the course of a few hours. To prevent any such unpleasant contingency as that, I therefore have to request that Your Excellency will do me the honour to visit me on board the ship before the hour of noon this day, to treat with me respecting the immediate surrender of the seventeen Englishmen already referred to.

"Failure to comply with this request will be followed by an immediate bombardment of the city, greatly as I shall regret the unnecessary sacrifice of life and property.

"I kiss Your Excellency's hands and feet,—

"And have the honour to be

"Your Excellency's most humble and obedient servant,—

"George Saint Leger."

Having read over this letter and *come to* the conclusion that it pretty clearly expressed all that he at that moment desired to say to the Governor of Panama, George made a further rummage of the cabin and, having at length found a sheet of paper large enough for his purpose, he took a pen and, dipping the feather of it in ink, proceeded laboriously to print upon it, in Spanish, a proclamation to the citizens of Panama, informing them that he, George Saint Leger, having certain differences to settle with His Excellency the Governor of the city, had, as a preliminary, captured the *Cristobal Colon*, to which ship he had summoned the Governor, before the hour of noon, for the purpose of a conference; and that, failing obedience on the Governor's part, the city would be bombarded. He therefore exhorted all citizens who were anxious to escape the horrors of a bombardment to use their influence with the Governor in order to persuade him to attend on board the galleon before the hour named.

This done, the young captain extinguished the lamp, the rays of which were already being dimmed by the daylight pouring down through the skylight and in through the side ports, and ascended to the poop to take a look round. As he stepped out on deck through the companion he perceived that the weather had again changed; the dark clouds which had been sweeping athwart the sky while he and his followers were making the passage from the shore to the ship had vanished, leaving a sky of deep, rich, stainless blue, brightening into clear primrose to the eastward over the summits of the sierras which stood out purple, sharp, and clean-cut against the delicate yellow that was changing, even as he looked, to a clear, warm orange before the approach of the risen but as yet invisible sun. The fresh breeze of a few hours before had dwindled away to a mere breathing, while inshore it had fallen a flat calm, leaving five small craft—probably bound for the Pearl Islands, some forty miles to the southward and eastward—idly swinging upon the low ground swell in the midst of the reflected image of the town and the hilly country behind it. A few pale blue wreaths of wood smoke were rising straight up into the clear morning air here and there over the roofs of the houses, showing that the early cup of chocolate was already in course of preparation for the luxury-loving Panamans, or possibly it might indicate that the working portion of the population were preparing their breakfast; and, peering through his perspective glass, George could see that the quay was already the scene of a considerable amount of animation. The young man laughed quietly to himself as the thought occurred to him that possibly some at least of the animation might be due to the fact that certain persons were busily engaged in an attempt to discover what had become of their missing boats. Then the upper limb of the sun throbbed suddenly into view over the ridge of the sierras, flashing like white-hot gold, a beam of golden light shot down the wooded slopes, a multitude of hitherto invisible objects sprang suddenly into view, and a new day had come to Panama. Meanwhile the calm had imperceptibly spread outward from the shore until it extended a good mile beyond the galleon, where it ended abruptly against a dark blue line showing where the sea-breeze was struggling to conquer the calm and force its way shoreward.

George now turned his attention to matters nearer at hand, and allowed his gaze to wander over the galleon's spacious decks. They were disgracefully dirty, speaking of the lax discipline that had been permitted to prevail by the easy-going officers of the ship, and he gave a sharp order which presently brought all hands on deck, considerably

refreshed, as he could see, by even the short spell of rest which they had enjoyed. Scrubbing brushes, mops, and buckets were searched for and found; and a few minutes later the decks were undergoing such a vigorous process of cleansing as they had not known for many a day. Then, as the planking rapidly dried in the hot rays of the sun, the baggage which the adventurers had brought with them across the isthmus was unpacked and, as the hour of eight boomed out from the Cathedral, Saint George's Cross was run up on the ensign staff of the galleon! A few fishing-boats were by this time returning to the harbour, and one of these George hailed and ordered alongside. The crew were negroes, and they gaped in open-mouthed astonishment as they passed through the entry port and beheld the decks alive with lithe, active seamen, florid-faced beneath the bronze of their skins, and most unquestionably foreigners. They hazarded no remarks, however, nor—to do them justice—did they exhibit any very great amount of alarm; they were doubtless slaves, animated by a whole-hearted hatred of their Spanish masters, and if the truth could have been arrived at they were probably by no means sorry to find that so fine a ship had fallen into the hands of men who were obviously enemies of the hated Spaniard. They took, with extravagant thanks, the gold which George offered them, and vowed to faithfully perform the service which the young captain demanded of them in return, which was, first to affix, in the most prominent position they could find in the market place, the Proclamation which he had prepared; and, secondly, to deliver at the Governor's house the letter addressed to that functionary, with which he entrusted them. Then, as soon as the fishermen had departed, all hands except the anchor watch went to breakfast.

Breakfast over, the sail-trimmers, under the boatswain, were sent round the decks to inspect and acquaint themselves thoroughly with the running rigging of the galleon, some of which was rove and led in a fashion different from that in vogue in English ships of the time, in order that they might know exactly where to lay their hands upon any required halliard, sheet, tack, brail, or downhaul in the darkest night; and while this was being done the guns' crew, under Barker, the gunner, carefully overhauled all the ordnance, great and small, and satisfied themselves that every piece was ready for immediate service. This done, the ordnance was loaded with a full powder charge, and a considerable quantity of shot of various kinds was sent up on deck, ready for immediate use; for George knew not how his message might be received by the Governor, and he was determined to be prepared for anything and everything that could possibly happen.

While these things were being done, Dyer the pilot, for want of something better to do, amused himself by studying the city generally through George's perspective glass; and after he had done so pretty thoroughly he approached his young captain with a suggestion.

"Cap'n," he said, "while you've been busy wi' Barker, there, about the ordnance, I've been starin' at the town through thick glass o' yours, and the thought have comed to me that if we're goin' to be obliged to bombard, we're anchored in the wrong place. We ought to be lyin' somewhere over there, a bit more to the east'ard, and a li'l bit closer inshore. So far 's I can make out, there's a gurt wide street runnin' right down to the shore yonder, just in a line wi' thicky big white house atop of the hill; and if we was anchored in line wi' thicky street, our shot 'd sweep un from end to end and, unless I be greatly mistaken, would play havoc wi' some of they big buildin's, the tops of which you can see over t'other houses, and which I thinks may be Gov'ment buildin's of some sort—ay, and I be right, too, for, look 'e there, dashed if they ain't hoistin' the Spanish flag upon the biggest of 'em now."

George took the glass and carefully studied the buildings indicated by Dyer, and soon came to the conclusion that the pilot was correct in surmising them to be Government buildings, for as Dyer had said, there was the golden flag of Spain floating from a flagstaff surmounting the most imposing of the group, which was undoubtedly Government House. But why had the flag only just now been hoisted? Had the fact any significance, or was it merely due to the neglect or forgetfulness of some subordinate official? For it was now close upon ten o'clock, and if the flag was hoisted daily, as of course it should be over a Government building, it ought to have been hoisted nearly two hours ago. And if the Spaniards had grown into the lazy habit of not hoisting it every day, why had they taken the trouble to do so on this particular morning? Was it done to indicate the defiance of George's threat?—for the latter had no doubt that his letter had by this time reached Don Silvio's hands.

He considered the matter for a few moments, and presently came to the conclusion that if the hoisting of the flag was intended to convey Don Silvio's defiance, it could do no harm to reply to it by shifting his berth to a spot more convenient than the present one for the purpose of a bombardment; he had very little doubt that the significance of the movement would be fully understood not only by Don Silvio, but also by the townsfolk generally; and he held the belief that in dealing with an antagonist it is always well to make it clear to him at the outset that you are in deadly earnest and mean every word you say. He had known cases where quarrels had assumed a most serious and irreconcilable form simply because each party had believed the other to be pretending to be more in earnest than he really was. Therefore, since the men were now doing nothing particular and it would be an advantage to them to acquire a working knowledge of their new ship as early as possible, George issued an order for the canvas to be loosed and the cable to be hove short preparatory to getting the galleon under way.

This was done with very commendable celerity by the men, considering that they were quite new to the ship; and in about twenty minutes the great hempen cable was "up and down," and the sail-trimmers were sent to the sheets and halliards to sheet home and hoist away. Five minutes later the anchor was out of the ground and the *Cristobal Colon* was adrift and canting.

It was at this moment that Basset, the captain of soldiers, who had in turn been amusing himself with George's glass, shouted:

"Do 'e see that. Captain? Thicky galley that we passed in harbour last night, her be comin' out. Do 'e think she'm comin' to attack we?"

"Maybe," answered George. "I can't tell. But whether she be or not, we must be ready for her. For she must not be allowed to escape. If she is not sent to attack us, she must be going in search of assistance; and we must not allow her to slip past us if we can possibly help it. Let me have that glass, if you please, and, Mr Basset, get your men



under arms forthwith.”

Basset handed over the glass and ran down the poop ladder, shouting as he went for the soldiers to don their armour, take their weapons, and proceed to their several fighting stations. Meanwhile George took the glass and carefully inspected the galley. She was coming out under the impulse of her oars alone, which looked very much as though she had been dispatched to re-take the galleon, since the wind was fair for her out of the Gulf, and she would at once set her sail if she were bound upon a long voyage. He saw that her fore-castle was crowded with soldiers, and that on that same fore-castle she carried a culverin round which were grouped the gun's crew, while behind it stood the gunner with linstock in hand. Then, looking beyond these, he descried upon the vessel's poop other soldiers, in the midst of which stood a group of some ten or twelve officers in complete armour, with their drawn swords in their hands. The galley was steering as though to intercept the galleon, which had by this time gathered way and was moving somewhat ponderously through the water.

“She means to attack us,” muttered George to himself as he lowered his glass from his eye. Then he flung a quick glance round his own decks, and saw that every eye was anxiously fixed upon him, awaiting his next order. He turned to the helmsman.

“Keep her away a point and get good way upon her,” he ordered. “I may want to tack presently, and it will not do for us to miss stays, with that galley watching for a chance to dash in upon us.”

Then he faced about to his crew and shouted for the gunner. “Mr Barker,” he said, “I am of opinion that yonder galley intends to attack us. But if she does not, we must attack and take her. I do not want her sunk, if it can be helped, for some of those for whom we are seeking may be aboard her; therefore our endeavour must be to sweep her decks clear of soldiers; and in order to do that I will have every piece of ordnance, both great and small, loaded with bullets, bags of nails, and any langrage that you can most readily lay hands upon. See to it at once, for in less than ten minutes she will be alongside. Sail-trimmers, to your stations! And archers, be ready to pour in a flight of arrows at short range.”

The galley, with the flag of Spain fluttering at her ensign staff, and a banner, bearing some emblazonment which George could not very well distinguish, streaming from her masthead, suddenly ceased pulling, the slaves resting upon their oars and raising the dripping blades high above the water; and a few seconds later a puff of white smoke burst from her bows, the report of her culverin boomed across the water, and the shot flew whirring athwart the galleon's bows, striking the water some twenty yards to leeward. Then, as George brought his glass to bear upon her, her oars once more dipped, while the gun's crew could be seen upon the fore-castle busily engaged in reloading their piece.

Saint Leger heaved a sigh of relief. “Thank God!” he murmured. “That shot clears up the last shred of doubt as to her intentions; and now we know where we are, and what we have to do.”

The chaplain appeared at his elbow and touched him lightly on the arm.

“She's going to fight us, isn't she, Cap'n?” he said. “Is it your pleasure that the crew go to prayers?”

“To prayers?” reiterated George. “With that galley within a quarter of a mile of us? There is no time for that, now, Sir Thomas. We shall be engaged within the next two minutes, therefore you must e'en go to prayers on behalf of all hands, while we do the fighting.”

“I'll do both,” retorted the chaplain; “I'll pray first and fight a'terwards!” And therewith he removed his cap, sank down upon his knees—those of the crew who happened to see him also uncovering—murmured a few words, and then, rising to his feet, calmly seized a long bow and a quiverful of arrows, drew a shaft from the quiver, fitted it to the string, and prepared to do his part manfully in the impending fight.

Meanwhile those in the galley seemed somewhat undecided as to what to do. Like the rest of her class she was fitted at the bow with a powerful beak or ram, just level with the surface of the water, the office of which was to pierce an enemy's ship about the water-line and so cause such a serious leak as to effectually distract the attention of the defenders. But in the present case there appeared to be some hesitation with regard to the adoption of this mode of attack, and George soon came to the conclusion that the galleon's cargo—the nature of which he had not yet found time to investigate—must be so enormously rich that the Spaniards were unwilling to risk its loss by ramming her. Certainly they did not at the moment appear to contemplate such a manoeuvre, for instead of pulling with all their strength, in order to get good way upon the galley, so that she might strike an effective blow, the slaves were doing little more than just give her steerage way. And seeing this, George suddenly determined upon a bold step. To cross a galley's bows was, under ordinary circumstances, simply to invite disaster, but noting the apparent hesitation of the galley's captain, Saint Leger determined to risk it in the present case; therefore, first signing to the helmsman to keep the ship away a trifle more, he turned to his crew and shouted: “Gunners, depress the muzzles of your pieces sufficiently to sweep yonder galley's deck, and fire just so soon as you can be sure to hit her. I am going to risk crossing her bows. Archers, stand ready to discharge your shafts. And let the waits play up ‘Ye gallant sons of Devon.’ If so be that there are any English among the galley-slaves, 'twill hearten the poor souls up a bit to know that some of their own countrymen be close at hand.”

And therewith the waits—some half a dozen instrumentalists—launched forth with an air that was at that time as familiar to every Devon man as his own name, though it is nearly if not quite forgotten now. Ten seconds later, every man on the galleon's decks, from George downward, was shouting the fine old song at the top of his voice, the melody going far out over the water and causing the haughty Dons on the galley's poop to stare in amazement.

Almost at the same instant the galley's culverin spoke again. This time the piece was aimed to hit, and it did so, piercing the galleon's larboard poop bulwark and passing so close to George's head that he distinctly felt the wind of it, while a big splinter from the bulwark not only knocked off his steel headpiece, but also scored his scalp so

shrewdly that in a moment he was almost blinded by the blood that streamed down into his eyes. The force of the blow caused him to stagger for a moment, and three or four men stationed at the smaller ordnance on the poop rushed toward him, fearing that he was badly hurt. But with a smile he ordered them back to their stations as he wiped the blood out of his eyes with his kerchief, and the next instant a loud twanging of bowstrings told that the archers had got to work. A final glance at the galley showed George that her oarsmen were still pulling slow and that there was ample room for the galleon to cross her bows; he therefore signed to the helmsman and the great ship went surging past, while her ordnance, great and small, belched forth a perfect tornado of bullets, nails, jagged fragments of iron and what not upon the deck of the devoted craft. When the smoke cleared away it was seen that the oars were drooping motionless in the water, and that of all that great crowd who a moment earlier stood upon her deck, scarcely a paltry dozen still remained upright. That terrific storm of missiles had most effectually done its work.

On the after deck but one solitary officer, clad in a complete suit of splendid armour, and with the hilt of his broken sword in his hand, stood among a heap of slain, and, seeing him, George sprang up on the rail of the galleon and hailed him:

“Do you surrender, señor, *a buena guerra?*” he demanded.

“What else can I do, señor, seeing that you have slain the whole of my crew with your infernal broadside?” he demanded. “Yes, señor,” he continued, “I surrender the ship, but I am disgraced for ever, and I will not increase my humiliation by becoming your prisoner.”

And therewith he calmly walked to the side of the galley and deliberately sprang overboard, sinking instantly, of course.



## Chapter Eighteen.

### How George found his brother.

“So much for Spanish pride!” muttered George to himself as he gazed thoughtfully at the little ring of foam and the few bubbles which alone marked the spot where the officer had disappeared. Then he stepped down off the rail and gave orders for the galleon to be hove-to.

Next came the order to “Out boats”; and when four of them had been lowered and brought to the gangway, George instructed Basset to take command of one, the boatswain of another, the armourer of the third, and announced his intention to himself command the fourth, leaving Dyer, the pilot, in temporary command of the ship. Every man told off to go in the boats of course went armed to the teeth, for the galley-slaves were known to be, as a rule, desperate characters, and George was already beginning to feel not a little puzzled as to how he was to deal with this batch, now that he had them. A few strokes of the oars sufficed to carry the boats alongside the galley, the long sweeps of which had meanwhile been laid in, and in another moment the Englishmen had scrambled up the craft’s low sides and stood upon her deck.

She was a vessel of about forty tons measurement, very long and shallow in proportion to her beam, with full deck

forward and aft, and narrow wash-boards on either side connecting the two, the remainder of her being open, the open portion protected from the sea by coamings all round about a foot high. And down in this open portion of the vessel were the galley-slaves, naked as the day they were born, and each chained to the bench upon which he sat. A gang-plank ran fore and aft of this space along the centre line of the ship, for the accommodation of the boatswains, usually two in number, whose duty it was to continually walk fore and aft, while the ship was under way, keeping a watchful eye upon the slaves, and stimulating them to exert themselves to the utmost, when working the sweeps, by free and unmerciful application of the whip to their naked bodies. The slaves were kept chained to their benches for days, and often for weeks, at a time; they toiled, ate, drank, and slept thus chained; and their condition and that of the interior which contained them may therefore be left to the imagination of the reader.

A moment's glance along the galley's deck sufficed to reveal to the Englishmen the devastating effect which that single broadside of langrage had wrought upon the unfortunate craft's crew. It had been fired at such close range that the missiles had only spread just sufficiently to include the entire range of the deck in its destructive sweep, and as the new arrivals gazed in amazement at the deep scores ploughed in the deck planking by the storm of iron and lead, running in a general direction fore and aft, and so close together that in some cases it was scarcely possible to lay a finger between them, the wonder was not that so many of the crew had been smitten down, but that there were any survivals at all. A glance down into the well, however, revealed the fact that the slaves, seated well below the level of the deck, and further protected by the stout coamings, had escaped almost scot-free.

Hastily directing Basset to see to the securing of the few unhurt prisoners, and to separate the wounded from the dead, George ran along the wash-board to the after deck and from this descended by a short flight of steps to the gang-plank running fore and aft the length of the well.

"Are there any Englishmen aboard this galley?" he demanded.

"Ay, that there be; eleven of us—or was, avore you fired upon us," answered a voice. "I'm afeared you've a-killed one or two of us down here, but what do that matter so long as you've a-come to deliver the rest of us out of this here floatin' hell, as, thanks be to God Almighty, you have, I do suppose."

"You are right, lad, we have," answered George, cheerily. "And who may you be?" he continued, a slight twang of his Devonshire dialect creeping into his speech in his excitement.

"I? Why I be Joe Cary, to Plymouth; and I was took a year ago at San Juan de Ulua, along wi' some others, when we put in there, under Admiral Hawkins, to refit. We've—"

"Tell me, quick, man," interrupted George. "Do you know anything of the whereabouts of a Mr Hubert Saint Leger, who was with Captain Drake in that affair?"

"Do I know anything about Mr Saint Leger?" repeated Cary. "Ay, sure I do. Why, he's one o' us here aboard this galley. 'Twas he that—Hi! Mr Saint Leger—Mr Saint Leger—what's come to 'e? Here be a vine brave Devonshire lad askin' about 'e. He's for'ard, sir, on the larboard side, the fourth bench ahead o' this here one that I be sittin' on."

There was no response to Cary's call, so George quickly turned and, striding along the gang-plank, reached the fourth bench, upon which sat three men, the middle one of which was supporting the senseless form of his neighbour nearest the gang-plank. Peering down, in the semi-darkness, George beheld in the senseless one a lean, muscular figure, his naked body brown with long exposure to the sun and weather, covered, as were the rest, with a growth of short hairs and, also as were the rest, with innumerable long cicatrices, some white and evidently the result of wounds inflicted long ago, but most of them of comparatively recent date, showing how mercilessly the boatswains were in the habit of plying their whips. But in the case of the man whom George was then gazing upon, those more or less ancient scars were almost obliterated by the blood which was still oozing from some thirty or more long slashes across the back, shoulders, loins and arms of the senseless one, whose features were almost hidden by a great, unkempt black beard and moustache already touched with grey, as was the touzled mop of black hair upon his head. Yet, through it all, as George's eyes grew accustomed to the twilight gloom of the place, he was able to recognise the features of his brother Hubert, obscured as they were with hair, dirt, and sweat.

"Is he dead?" he demanded of the man who was supporting him.

"Nay, señor, I think not," answered the man. "I believe he has but swooned under the merciless flogging inflicted by that demon yonder, whom your shot have slain and so perchance saved from a better merited death."

"And why did he flog this man so mercilessly?" demanded George in a tone of terrible calmness.

"Because," answered the man, "it was Hubert, here, who, when he heard the music from your ship, shouted to us that you were English, and that, if we would stop rowing, you would take the galley and set us all free."

George raised his head above the combing and shouted to the armourer: "Miles, come down here at once with your hammer and chisel. There is a man here—several men—whom I wish to release from their fetters."

"Señor," interposed the man who was supporting Hubert's senseless form, and who seemed to guess what George required, "if you will feel in the pocket of that dead boatswain's doublet, you will find the key to unlock our chains."

"Thanks," responded George as he bent over the dead boatswain; and a minute later he had unlocked the chain which confined his brother's body to the bench, and was calling to another man to help him to carry it up on deck.

"Señor—señor, are you not going to release us also?" demanded Hubert's comrade, as George turned away to arrange for the dispatch of his brother to the galleon.

"In good time, *amigo*, in good time," answered George. "A little patience is all you now need. I will return to you later."

With infinite care Hubert's body was lowered into a boat and dispatched to the galleon, with an imperative order from George to the surgeon to treat his patient gently and do his utmost for him. Then the young captain proceeded to release the remaining Englishmen and send them also aboard the galleon to be cared for.

And next came the question of what was to be done with the galley-slaves and the galley. It was a knotty question to decide, for here were a hundred-and-eighty men, many of whom were no doubt criminals and desperados of the very worst type; to release whom and turn them loose upon society involved a tremendous responsibility. Yet after even the cursory glimpse that George had caught of the life of a galley-slave, he could not bring himself to hand over those men to the tender mercies of the Spaniards and so in all probability insure for them a continuance of life in what Cary had graphically described as a floating hell, which was a punishment infinitely worse than death, and far too severe for even the most atrocious crimes. George called Basset to his aid in the consideration of this momentous question; and finally, at the suggestion of the latter, he descended again to the ship's interior and sought the man who had been Hubert's companion on the bench.

"Friend," said he, "you asked me, a little while ago, to release you. If I were to do so, what would you and your comrades do with yourselves?"

"It is just what Pedro and I"—indicating his companion upon the bench—"have been discussing together, señor," answered the man.

"Well," said George, "have you arrived at any decision upon the matter?"

"Yes, señor, we have," was the reply. "We have decided that, even were you willing to give us the galley, we could not keep the sea very long, because none of us understand the navigation of a ship, and our provisions would soon run short; moreover, galleys will only sail before the wind, and we have had enough of rowing to last us for the rest of our lives. On the other hand, we are all outlaws, and if we were to land on the mainland we should be hunted down and killed, sooner or later, or, worse still, taken and condemned to the galleys afresh. But outside the Gulf, some two hundred miles or more to the westward, there is a certain uninhabited island, at which this galley has often called for water. It is large enough to support four or five times our number, and although none of us are navigators we could easily find it by simply following the coast line. Its soil is rich, there are abundant fruit trees upon it, and plenty of water; we could easily support ourselves in comfort there, señor; and Pedro and I think that if you will graciously release us and give us the galley, we could do no better than go there and settle down upon it."

The rest of the galley-slaves had been listening eagerly to what was being said, as George could easily see; the scheme commended itself to him as an excellent one in itself, moreover it pointed a way out of the double difficulty of how to get rid of the slaves and the galley; he therefore appealed to the listening crowd by saying to them:

"You have all heard your comrade's plan. Are you willing to fall in with it?"

"*Si, señor; si, si. Mille gracias,*" replied the slaves, with such perfect unanimity that the young man no longer hesitated.

"So be it," he said. Then, turning to one of the men who was with him, he directed him to release the Spaniard on the bench, and, having done that, to hand him the keys that he might release his comrades; after which he ordered the prisoners, wounded and unwounded, to be passed down into the boats, which done, the victors pulled away for the galleon. But they were scarcely alongside when the galley's sweeps were thrust outboard and the craft was under way again, heading south, with one of the slaves proudly standing at the tiller and leading an enthusiastic cheer as the galley swept at speed close under the towering stern of the galleon.

George's first act, upon returning to the galleon, was to direct Dyer to take the ship to the spot for which they had been aiming when they were intercepted by the galley, and anchor her there; then he descended to the sick bay, to find that under Chichester's skilled hands his brother had not only been revived from his swoon, but also that his terrible wounds had been bathed, treated with a soothing and healing ointment, bound up, and the patient made as comfortable as was possible upon a swinging pallet which the surgeon had caused to be rigged up in order that Hubert might not be disturbed by the motion of the ship, and might lie face down for a few days until the smart had gone out of his wounds and they had begun to heal.

George was greatly affected at the sight of his brother lying there stretched out upon the pallet, with his head resting upon a pillow supported by his arms, and unable to move his body in the least without suffering excruciating agony. But, terrible as Hubert's plight was, he still had spirit enough to make light of it when his brother, kneeling down by the side of the pallet, bent over him and tenderly kissed him on the brow. He smiled happily up into George's face and, with an effort that must have been torment to him, freed his right hand and grasped that of his brother as he murmured:

"You only fired that broadside just in time to save me, old chap. Another half-minute, and that fiend of a boatswain would have killed me. I won't ask you now how you happened to find me, that must wait until you have more time to talk and I more strength to listen; moreover, that splendid fellow Chichester has been telling me a bit of the story while he was dressing my wounds. But one thing you must tell me, Georgie. How is the dear mother?"

The fact that George had nothing but good news to communicate to his brother seemed to cheer the latter amazingly, and caused him to so far forget his fearful injuries that he went on asking question after question until Chichester felt constrained to intervene and imperatively insist that the young captain should go on deck and leave his brother to get a little urgently needed rest.

As George ascended to the poop, almost dazed with the good fortune which had enabled him to so unexpectedly deliver his brother from a life that was one long torment, his ears were greeted with the cries of the mariners shortening sail; and a few minutes later the galleon's anchor was dropped in the new berth for which the ship had been making. The sails were furled, the decks cleared up, ropes coiled down, and every preparation made for the expected visit of the Governor. And shortly afterward a large boat, pulling twelve oars, with an awning spread over the stern sheets, and with the Spanish flag floating from an ensign staff set up in the stern, was seen coming out of the harbour and heading toward the *Cristobal Colon*.

Twenty minutes later she ranged up alongside, and a party of ten Spaniards, dressed most extravagantly in the height of the prevailing mode, proceeded to climb with more or less difficulty the lofty side of the galleon, where, as they passed in through the entry port, they were received by George at the head of his officers. The contrast in appearance between these popinjays, arrayed in silks and satins of the most costly description, with splendid jewels round their necks, on their fingers, and in their ears, their oiled, curled, and perfumed locks surmounted by jaunty little caps of silk or velvet decorated with beautiful feathers secured in place by gem-set brooches, and the sturdy Devon lads, attired mostly in perfectly plain armour not altogether guiltless of rust, beneath which showed their well-worn clothing, was a striking one indeed, but there was a stern, business-like look on the faces of the Englishmen that promptly checked any disposition to sneer on the part of the Spaniards.

The visitors were of course received with every manifestation of the most elaborate courtesy on the part of the English, and there was a tremendous amount of bowing and scraping on the galleon's quarter-deck before even a word was spoken. Presently, however, a tall, dark Spaniard, of about forty years of age, his handsome features marked with an expression of considerable resolution, stepped forward and said, with a bow:

"Señores, I am the Governor of Panama. Who among you is Señor George Saint Leger?"

"I am he, at Your Excellency's service," answered George, with a corresponding bow.

"You?" ejaculated the Governor, incredulously. "Why, you are only a boy. Where is your leader? It is he with whom my present business is concerned."

"Your Excellency," responded George, "I have the honour to be the captain of the company you see about you."

"Ten thousand pardons, señor!" exclaimed the Governor, bowing low. "I trust that you will magnanimously forgive my hasty expression of surprise. I ought to have remembered that in your gallant nation age does not necessarily count, and that among you are many very young men who are doing work that fills us of maturer years with astonishment, admiration and envy. Again I crave your pardon for my exceedingly stupid mistake. It is you, then, señor, who addressed this letter to me?" And he drew forth from a wallet at his belt George's letter to him.

"Even so, Your Excellency," acknowledged George.

"And in it you say that you wish to treat with me for the release of seventeen Englishmen sent here as prisoners from Nombre de Dios. Very well, señor; I am prepared to treat with you upon that matter; but it must be upon certain conditions. And the first of those conditions is that you unconditionally surrender this ship to her captain and officers, whom I have brought with me in order that they may receive her at your hands."

"Your Excellency, the condition you name is an impossible one, not to be considered for an instant. Let us dismiss it, and pass on to the next, if there be a next," answered George calmly.

"Next?" reiterated the Governor, a trifle tartly, "of course there is a next—several of them, indeed. But it is useless to speak of them until this, perhaps the most important of them all, is settled. Upon what grounds do you assert that my first condition is impossible, señor? You have secured possession of her by craft and in a manner which, if I may be permitted to say so, amounts simply to piracy. Our countries are not at war, señor. Then by what right do you seize a Spanish ship and, worse still, refuse to surrender her to her lawful owners, the representatives of His Most Catholic Majesty of Spain?"

"Ah!" returned George, with a great appearance of simplicity, "now there Your Excellency puzzles me. I can't exactly tell you by what right I do this, and have done a good many other things on the north side of the isthmus; but it is by the same right that justified Don Martin Enriquez, His Most Catholic Majesty's Viceroy of Mexico, when he attacked the fleet of Admiral Hawkins while he was refitting his ships in the harbour of San Juan de Ulua, last year."

For a few moments the Governor looked—and was—decidedly "taken aback." He could find no satisfactory reply to George's argument, for the sufficient reason that none such existed. But presently he pulled himself together and said:

"The occurrence to which you have referred, señor, was a most deplorable blunder on the Viceroy's part; but I had no hand in it, and I must refuse to be held responsible for it. You must yourself surely admit that it would be unjust in the extreme to make me answerable for the actions of a man over whom I have no control whatever."

"Oh, yes," retorted George, "I quite admit that; and it is not in your personal capacity, but merely as a Spaniard, that I am holding you and all Spaniards responsible for that outrage. And I hold Spaniards generally responsible for it, señor, for the reason that no attempt has been made by any Spaniard to right the wrong that was done. Yourself, for example, when invited to do what you could to rectify the matter, as far as might be, by releasing seventeen Englishmen unlawfully captured during the commission of the 'blunder,' curtly refused to take any steps whatever. Hence my presence here, and my capture of this ship. Need I say any more?"

It was necessary for George to say a great deal more before he succeeded in bringing the stiff-necked Don to reason, and in the process of doing so he told His Excellency a few home truths that first sent that functionary into a towering

passion and then turned him sick with fear; but at length Don Silvio was brought to see the futility of kicking against the pricks, and finally he gave in with a good grace, the more readily when he learned that eleven out of the seventeen men demanded had already been taken out of the captured galley; he agreed with George that it was scarcely worth while to expose a number of important cities to the horrors of bombardment and valuable ships to the risk of capture for the sake of detaining half a dozen Englishmen in captivity; he therefore at length struck a bargain with the relentless young captain that, in consideration of the latter undertaking to abstain from further molestation of Spanish life and property, he, the Governor of Panama, would forthwith take the necessary steps to have the six Englishmen, or as many of them as happened to be still alive, immediately released and handed over to their own countrymen, signing a document to that effect. This document, drafted by George, with the assistance of Basset, and young Heard, the purser, was quite an elaborate affair, providing for many things, the first of which was the retention of the *Cristobal Colon* and her cargo by her captors; second, that during the period of waiting for the release of the six Englishmen the authorities of Panama were to daily supply the ship with meat, vegetables, and fruit in sufficient quantities for the requirements of the crew; third, that if it should be found that any of the six Englishmen had succumbed to the hardships incidental to their life as galley-slaves, the sum of ten thousand ducats was to be paid upon each man missing, as compensation to his relatives. There were several other clauses in the agreement, all providing against anything in the nature of treachery on the part of the Spaniards, and to these Don Silvio objected most strenuously, on the ground that they were an insult to the honour of every Spaniard; but George insisted upon their retention, bluntly stating that, after the example which had been set by His Excellency the Viceroy of Mexico, it was impossible for any Englishman to rely upon any Spaniard's honour. And in return for all this the Englishmen agreed to observe a strict truce for six weeks. The reading of the draft was followed by a tremendous amount of talk and numerous protests, in response to which the stringency of a few of the clauses was somewhat modified, and finally the two fair copies of the agreement were signed there and then, first by the Governor and George as the two contracting parties, and afterwards by the Spanish and English officers as witnesses.

This done, the visitors were entertained on board the galleon to an impromptu luncheon, which, as it was prepared by the Spanish cook, released from the limbo of below for the occasion, and as the viands and wines were drawn from the ship's stores, was done ample justice to. Then George, accompanied by Basset, went ashore with the Governor and his followers, to be present at an investigation which was to determine the whereabouts of the six Englishmen whose release was in question, and who were ultimately found to have been drafted to a galley named the *Tiburón*, which, after considerable further research, was discovered to be then stationed at Port Lima. The next business was the preparation of an order to the Governor of Lima to immediately release the six Englishmen "named in the margin" and return them to Panama without delay; and before returning to the ship George had the satisfaction of witnessing the departure of a dispatch boat with the order on board.

On the following day the Spanish crew of the *Cristobal Colon* were released and sent on shore; and, this done, all tension between the Spaniards and the English was immediately relaxed, the Spaniards, with their high-flown ideas of chivalry, vying with each other in showing the utmost cordiality and attention to their whilom enemies; so that, on the whole, George and his officers, to say nothing of the men, were given a fairly pleasant time during their sojourn at Panama, in return for which they, among other things, assisted materially to extinguish a fire which one night broke out in the city and, for a time, threatened to lay the greater part of it in ashes.

Finally, on the twenty-seventh day after her departure, the dispatch boat returned from Port Lima, bringing with her the six Englishmen, safe and sound, but of course in a somewhat broken condition from their dreadful experiences on board the *Tiburón*; and thus George Saint Leger at length triumphantly accomplished all that he had undertaken to do when he set out upon his adventurous voyage.

By this time Hubert Saint Leger had sufficiently recovered from his terrible injuries to be able to rise and dress without assistance, while all the other rescued English were doing well, their only desire now being to return home to their relatives and friends as soon as possible. Therefore, there now being nothing to longer detain them at Panama, on the day after the return of the dispatch boat and the formal surrender of the six Englishmen, George and his officers bade farewell to the city and its inhabitants, and weighed anchor for the south, glad enough to escape to the pure breezes of the sea once more.

The *Cristobal Colon* proved to be a somewhat dull sailer, nevertheless the adventurers made good progress down the western seaboard of South America, the voyage being wholly uneventful save for the usual experiences of mariners, and, missing the Straits of Magellan, the galleon rounded the Horn in the embrace of a blustering westerly gale, on the forty-third day after their departure from Panama, by which time all the invalids were perfectly recovered and not only fit but eager for duty. True, the weather which they encountered during the fortnight that they were in the neighbourhood of Cape Horn proved rather trying to all hands, accustomed as they had now become to the enervating climate of the tropics, but it was by this time early summer in the southern hemisphere, and although the air was keen it was also bracing, and Chichester, the surgeon, stoutly maintained that a taste of it was all that was needed to set everybody perfectly right.

Then followed the long weary drag up the eastern coast of South America, and everybody was rejoiced when, on a certain glorious morning of the last month of the year, they rounded the north-eastern angle of the continent—now known as Cape San Roque—and bore away to the westward for the creek where the *Nonsuch* still—as they hoped—lay securely hidden. And at this point in the voyage they were exceptionally favoured by the elements, for they accomplished their second passage of the Line without a minute's delay from calms. On the last day of the year they sailed past Trinidad, joyfully recognising its lofty heights and its three distinct entrances to the gulf as they passed; and on the evening of January 15th, 1570, they entered the hidden harbour near Nombre, where they had left the *Nonsuch*, and found her apparently not a penny the worse for her five months' sojourn there. For Lukabela, the Cimarrone chief, had so scrupulously fulfilled his promise to look after the ship that a party of twenty men had been camped on the beach for the past five months, and had every day visited her and thoroughly soused her deck and upper works with water.

Immediately upon the arrival of the *Cristobal Colon* in the cove, a messenger was dispatched to Lukabela with the

news; and within a couple of hours he appeared on board to personally welcome his friends upon their return. George at once concluded an arrangement with the chief for the supply of a strong gang of men to assist in refitting the *Nonsuch*; and on the following day the work was energetically begun, and so strenuously carried forward that ten days later the vessel was ready for sea. All that now remained was to suitably reward the Cimarrones for their services, and this George did upon so lavish a scale that Lukabela there and then vowed to hold himself and his tribe henceforth at the service of any and every Englishman who might visit those waters. The Englishmen were then divided into two parties proportionate to the tonnage of the ships, George resuming the command of the *Nonsuch*, while he put Hubert—now completely recovered, and a strong, robust, handsome man once more—in command of the galleon. This made both ships very short-handed, but it was the only arrangement possible, for during their voyage round from Panama the cargo of the galleon had been overhauled, and found to be so enormously rich, and of such great bulk, that it was deemed unwise to entrust it and the rest of the treasure to a single ship; therefore on a certain glorious January morning all hands went to work to unmoor both ships, and by mid-day they were clear of the cove and heading north for the treasure island, which they reached five days later. But during that five days' voyage it had become so clear to all that both ships must be thoroughly cleared of weed before the voyage across the Atlantic was undertaken, that they decided to careen them before proceeding further. This was accordingly done, the work occupying all hands for three months; but when it was done both craft were fit in every respect to battle with the spring gales which they knew awaited them.

Finally, they sailed from the treasure island on the fifth day of May, 1570, and working their way to the north-east between the islands of Cuba and San Domingo, hit the Gulf Stream, which swept them to windward as they struggled northward against the north-east trade-wind. This proved to be the most tedious and wearisome part of their passage; for upon clearing the trades they were fortunate enough to run into a succession of strong westerly winds, before which they went foaming and rolling across the Atlantic at a merry rate, arriving in Plymouth Sound within two hours of each other, on the afternoon of the twenty-seventh of July, 1570, to the joy of everybody concerned, after an absence from home of just over fifteen months.

The partition of the treasure was immediately proceeded with; and so enormous was its amount that even the lowest grade of mariner received sufficient to render him independent in a modest way for the remainder of his life, while as for George, he was—after old Simon Radlett, the owner of the *Nonsuch*—easily the richest man in all Plymouth, his share being sufficient not only for his own needs but also for those of his brother Hubert, with whom he insisted upon an equal division, despite the energetic and long-continued protests of the elder brother.

For a time there was a possibility that George's exploits on the Spanish Main and at Panama might involve him in serious trouble with the Queen; indeed he and old Simon Radlett were summoned to London to give an account of themselves. Luckily, however, for them, the Catholics were at the moment making themselves obnoxious in the matter of conspiracies in favour of Mary, Queen of Scots, while Philip of Spain was also out of Elizabeth's favour; consequently Her Majesty was just in the right mood to be favourably impressed by the straightforward story which George had to tell; and his account of the doings of the Inquisition at San Juan de Ulua, and the atrocities practised upon the galley-slave prisoners, as witnessed by himself, excited such lively sympathy in the Queen's breast that, instead of sending them to the Tower, as they at one time more than half-expected, she knighted them both and sent them back to Plymouth happy in the full assurance of her most gracious favour.

## The End.

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