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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIR HENRY MORGAN, BUCCANEER: A ROMANCE OF THE SPANISH MAIN ***

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Sir Henry Morgan

BUCCANEER



Sir Henry Morgan—Buccaneer.

A Romance of the Spanish Main

BY

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

Author of "For Love of Country," "For the Freedom of the Sea," "The Southerners," "Hohenzollern," "The Quiberon Touch," "Woven with the Ship," "In the Wasp's Nest," Etc.



Illustrations by J.N. MARCHAND and WILL CRAWFORD

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Sir Henry Morgan, Buccaneer *Issued October, 1903*

[Pg 8]

TO MY ONLY BROTHER

COLONEL JASPER EWING BRADY

LATE U.S. ARMY

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"Woe to the realms which he coasted! for there
Was shedding of blood and rending of hair,
Rape of maiden and slaughter of priest,
Gathering of ravens and wolves to the feast;
When he hoisted his standard black,
Before him was battle, behind him wrack,
And he burned the churches, that heathen Dane,
To light his band to their barks again."

SCOTT: "Harold the Dauntless."

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PREFACE

In literature there have been romantic pirates, gentlemanly pirates, kind-hearted pirates, even humorous pirates—in fact, all sorts and conditions of pirates. In life there was only one kind. In this book that kind appears. Several presentations—in the guise of novels—of pirates, the like of which never existed on land or sea, have recently appeared. A perusal of these interesting romances awoke in me a desire to write a story of a real pirate, a pirate of the genuine species.

Much research for historical essays, amid ancient records and moldy chronicles, put me in possession of a vast amount of information concerning the doings of the greatest of all pirates; a man unique among his nefarious brethren, in that he played the piratical game so successfully that he received the honor of knighthood from King Charles II. A belted knight of England, who was also a brutal, rapacious, lustful, murderous villain and robber—and undoubtedly a pirate, although he disguised his piracy under the name of buccaneering—is certainly a striking and unusual figure.

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Therefore, when I imagined my pirate story I pitched upon Sir Henry Morgan as *the* character of the romance. It will spare the critic to admit that the tale hereinafter related is a work of the imagination, and is not an historical romance. According to the latest accounts, Sir Henry Morgan, by a singular oversight of Fate, who must have been nodding at the time, died in his bed

—not peacefully I trust—and was buried in consecrated ground. But I do him no injustice, I hasten to assure the reader, in the acts that I have attributed to him, for they are more than paralleled by the well authenticated deeds of this human monster. I did not even invent the blowing up of the English frigate in the action with the Spanish ships.

If I have assumed for the nonce the attributes of that unaccountably somnolent Fate, and brought him to a terrible end, I am sure abundant justification will be found in the recital of his mythical misdeeds, which, I repeat, were not a circumstance to his real transgressions. Indeed, one has to go back to the most cruel and degenerate of the Roman emperors to parallel the wickednesses of Morgan and his men. It is not possible to put upon printed pages explicit statements of what they did. The curious reader may find some account of these "Gentlemen of the Black Flag," so far as it can be translated into present-day books intended for popular reading, in my volume of "COLONIAL FIGHTS AND FIGHTERS."

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The writing of this novel has been by no means an easy task. How to convey clearly the doings of the buccaneer so there could be no misapprehension on the part of the reader, and yet to write with due delicacy and restraint a book for the general public, has been a problem with which I have wrestled long and arduously. The whole book has been completely revised some six times. Each time I have deleted something, which, while it has refined, I trust has not impaired the strength of the tale. If the critic still find things to censure, let him pass over charitably in view of what might have been!

As to the other characters, I have done violence to the name and fame of no man, for all of those who played any prominent part among the buccaneers in the story were themselves men scarcely less criminal than Morgan. Be it known that I have simply appropriated names, not careers. They all had adventures of their own and were not associated with Morgan in life. Teach—I have a weakness for that bad young man—is known to history as "Blackbeard"—a much worse man than the roaring singer of these pages. The delectable Hornigold, the One-Eyed, with the "wild justice" of his revenge, was another real pirate. So was the faithful Black Dog, the maroon. So were Raveneau de Lussan, Rock Brazilliano, L'Ollonois, Velsers, Sawkins, and the rest.

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In addition to my desire to write a real story of a real pirate I was actuated by another intent. There are numberless tales of the brave days of the Spanish Main, from "Westward Ho!" down. In every one of them, without exception, the hero is a noble, gallant, high-souled, high-spirited, valiant descendant of the Anglo-Saxon race, while the villain—and such villains they are!—is always a proud and haughty Spaniard, who comes to grief dreadfully in the final trial which determines the issue. My sympathies, from a long course of reading of such romances, have gone out to the under Don. I determined to write a story with a Spanish gentleman for the hero, and a Spanish gentlewoman for the heroine, and let the position of villain be filled by one of our own race. Such things were, and here they are. I have dwelt with pleasure on the love affairs of the gallant Alvarado and the beautiful Mercedes.

But, after all, the story is preëminently the story of Morgan. I have striven to make it a character sketch of that remarkable personality. I wished to portray his ferocity and cruelty, his brutality and wantonness, his treachery and rapacity; to exhibit, without lightening, the dark shadows of his character, and to depict his inevitable and utter breakdown finally; yet at the same time to bring out his dauntless courage, his military ability, his fertility and resourcefulness, his mastery of his men, his capacity as a seaman, which are qualities worthy of admiration. Yet I have not intended to make him an admirable figure. To do that would be to falsify history and disregard the artistic canons. So I have tried to show him as he was; great and brave, small and mean, skilful and able, greedy and cruel; and lastly, in his crimes and punishment, a coward.

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And if a mere romance may have a lesson, here in this tale is one of a just retribution, exhibited in the awful, if adequate, vengeance finally wreaked upon Morgan by those whom he had so fearfully and dreadfully wronged.

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY.

BROOKLYN, N.Y., *December, 1902.*

NOTE.—The date of the sack of Panama has been advanced to comply with the demands of this romance.

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BOOK I


HOW SIR HENRY MORGAN IN HIS OLD AGE RESOLVED TO GO A-BUCCANEERING AGAIN

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SIR HENRY MORGAN, BUCCANEER

CHAPTER I

WHEREIN SIR HENRY MORGAN MADE GOOD USE OF THE TEN MINUTES ALLOWED HIM

 is Gracious Majesty, King Charles II. of England, in sportive—and acquisitive—mood, had made him a knight; but, as that merry monarch himself had said of another unworthy subject whom he had ennobled—his son, by the left hand—"God Almighty could not make him a gentleman!"

Yet, to the casual inspection, little or nothing appeared to be lacking to entitle him to all the consideration attendant upon that ancient degree. His attire, for instance, might be a year or two behind the fashion of England and still further away from that of France, then, as now, the standard maker in dress, yet it represented the extreme of the mode in His Majesty's fair island of Jamaica. That it was a trifle too vivid in its colors, and too striking in its contrasts for the best taste at home, possibly might be condoned by the richness of the material used and the prodigality of trimming which decorated it. Silk and satin from the Orient, lace from Flanders, leather from Spain, with jewels from everywhere, marked him as

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a person entitled to some consideration, at least. Even more compulsory of attention, if not of respect, were his haughty, overbearing, satisfied manner, his look of command, the expression of authority in action he bore.

Quite in keeping with his gorgeous appearance was the richly furnished room in which he sat in autocratic isolation, plumed hat on head, quaffing, as became a former brother-of-the-coast and sometime buccaneer, amazing draughts of the fiery spirits of the island of which he happened to be, *ad interim*, the Royal Authority.

But it was his face which attested the acuteness of the sneering observation of the unworthy giver of the royal accolade. No gentleman ever bore face like that. Framed in long, thin, gray curls which fell upon his shoulders after the fashion of the time, it was as cruel, as evil, as sensuous, as ruthless, as powerful an old face as had ever looked over a bulwark at a sinking ship, or viewed with indifference the ravaging of a devoted town. Courage

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there was, capacity in large measure, but not one trace of human kindness. Thin, lean, hawk-like, ruthless, cunning, weather-beaten, it was sadly out of place in its brave attire in that vaulted chamber. It was the face of a man who ruled by terror; who commanded by might. It was the face of an adventurer, too, one never sure of his position, but always ready to fight for it, and able to fight well. There was a watchful, alert, inquiring look in the fierce blue eyes, an intent, expectant expression in the craggy countenance, that told of the uncertainties of his assumptions; yet the lack of assurance was compensated for by the firm, resolute line of the mouth under the trifling upturned mustache, with its lips at the same time thin and sensual. To be fat and sensual is to appear to mitigate the latter evil with at least a pretence at good humor; to be thin and sensual is to be a devil. This man was evil, not with the grossness of a debauchee but with the thinness of the devotee. And he was an old man, too. Sixty odd years of vicious life, glossed over in the last two decades by an assumption of respectability, had swept over the gray hairs, which evoked no reverence.

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There was a heavy frown on his face on that summer evening in the year of our Lord, 1685. The childless wife whom he had taken for his betterment and her worsening, some ten years since—in succession to Satan only knew how many nameless, unrecognized precursors—had died a few moments before, in the chamber above his head. Fairly bought from a needy father, she had been a cloak to lend him a certain respectability when he settled down, red with the blood of thousands whom he had slain and rich with the treasure of cities that he had wasted, to enjoy the evening of his life. Like all who are used for such purposes, she knew, after a little space, the man over whom the mantle of her reputation had been flung. She had rejoiced at the near approach of that death for which she had been longing almost since her wedding day. That she had shrunk from him in the very articles of dissolution when he stood by her bedside, indicated the character of the relationship.

To witness death and to cause it had been the habit of this man. He marked it in her case, as in others, with absolute indifference—he cared so little for her that he did not even feel relief at her going—yet because he was the Governor of Jamaica (really he was only the Vice-Governor, but between the departure of the Royal Governor and the arrival of another he held supreme power) he had been forced to keep himself close on the day his wife died, by that public opinion to which he was indifferent but which he could not entirely defy. Consequently he had not been on the strand at Port Royal when the *Mary Rose*, frigate, fresh from England, had dropped anchor in the harbor after her weary voyage across the great sea. He did not even yet know of her arrival, and therefore the incoming Governor had not been welcomed by the man who sat temporarily, as he had in several preceding interregnums, in the seats of the mighty.

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However, everybody else on the island had welcomed him with joy, for of all men who had ever held office in Jamaica Sir Henry Morgan, sometime the chief devil of those nefarious bands who disguised their piracy under the specious title of buccaneering, was the most detested. But because of the fortunate demise of Lady Morgan, as it turned out, Sir Henry was not present to greet My Lord Carlingford, who was to supersede him—and more.

The deep potations the old buccaneer had indulged in to all outward intent passed harmlessly down his lean and craggy throat. He drank alone—the more solitary the drinker the more dangerous the man—yet the room had another occupant, a tall, brawny, brown-hued, grim-faced savage, whose gaudy livery ill accorded with his stern and ruthless visage. He stood by the Vice-Governor, watchful, attentive, and silent, imperturbably filling again and again the goblet from which he drank.

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"More rum," said the master, at last breaking the silence while lifting his tall glass toward the man. "Scuttle me, Black Dog," he added, smiling sardonically at the silent maroon who poured again with steady hand, "you are the only soul on this island who doesn't fear me. That woman above yonder, curse her, shuddered away from me as I looked at her dying. But your hand is steady. You and old Ben Hornigold are the only ones who don't shrink back, hey, Carib? Is it love or hate?" he mused, as the man made no answer. "More," he cried, again lifting the glass which he had instantly drained.

But the maroon, instead of pouring, bent his head toward the window, listened a moment, and

then turned and lifted a warning hand. The soft breeze of the evening, laden with the fragrance of the tropics, swept up from the river and wafted to the Vice-Governor's ears the sound of hoof beats on the hard, dry road. With senses keenly alert, he, also, listened. There were a number of them, a troop possibly. They were drawing nearer; they were coming toward his house, the slimmer house near Spanish Town, far up on the mountain side, where he sought relief from the enervating heats of the lower land.

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"Horsemen!" he cried. "Coming to the house! Many of them! Ah, they dismount. Go to the door, Carib."

But before the maroon could obey they heard steps on the porch. Some one entered the hall. The door of the drawing-room was abruptly thrown open, and two men in the uniform of the English army, with the distinguishing marks of the Governor's Guard at Jamaica, unceremoniously entered the room. They were fully armed. One of them, the second, had drawn his sword and held a cocked pistol in the other hand. The first, whose weapons were still in their sheaths, carried a long official paper with a portentous seal dangling from it. Both were booted and spurred and dusty from riding, and both, contrary to the custom and etiquette of the island, kept their plumed hats on their heads.

"Sir Henry Morgan——" began the bearer of the paper.

"By your leave, gentlemen," interrupted Morgan, with an imperious wave of his hand, "Lieutenant Hawxherst and Ensign Bradley of my guard, I believe. You will uncover at once and apologize for having entered so unceremoniously."

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As he spoke, the Governor rose to his feet and stood by the table, his right hand unconsciously resting upon the heavy glass flagon of rum. He towered above the other two men as he stood there transfixing them with his resentful glance, his brow heavy with threat and anger. But the two soldiers made no movement toward complying with the admonition of their sometime superior.

"D'ye hear me?" he cried, stepping forward, reddening with rage at their apparent contumacy. "And bethink ye, sirs, had best address me, who stand in the place of the King's Majesty, as 'Your Excellency,' or I'll have you broke, knaves."

"We need no lessons in manners from you, Sir Henry Morgan," cried Hawxherst, angry in turn to be so browbeaten, though yesterday he would have taken it mildly enough. "And know by this, sir," lifting the paper, "that you are no longer Governor of this island, and can claim respect from no one."

"What do you mean?"

"The *Mary Rose* frigate arrived this morning, bringing Lord Carlingford as His Majesty's new Governor, and this order of arrest."

"Arrest? For whom?"

"For one Sir Henry Morgan."

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"For what, pray?"

"Well, sir, for murder, theft, treason—the catalogue fills the paper. You are to be despatched to England to await the King's pleasure. I am sent by Lord Carlingford to fetch you to the jail at Port Royal."

"You seem to find it a pleasant task."

"By heaven, I do, sir!" cried the soldier fiercely. "I am a gentleman born, of the proudest family in the Old Dominion, and have been forced to bow and scrape and endure your insults and commands, you bloody villain, but now——"

"'Tis no part of a soldier's duty, sir, to insult a prisoner," interrupted Morgan, not without a certain dignity. He was striving to gain time to digest this surprising piece of news and thinking deeply what was to be done in this entirely unexpected crisis.

"Curse it all, Hawxherst!" Ensign Bradley burst out, pulling at the sleeve of his superior. "You go too far, man; this is unseemly."

Hawxherst passed his hand across his brow and by an effort somewhat regained his self-control.

"Natheless 'tis in this paper writ that you are to go to England a prisoner on the *Mary Rose*, to await the King's pleasure," he added, savagely.

"His Gracious Majesty hath laid his sword upon my shoulder. I am a knight of his English court, one who has served him well upon the seas. His coffers have I enriched by—but let that pass. I do not believe that King Charles, God bless him——"

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"Stop! The *Mary Rose* brings the news that King Charles II. is dead, and there reigns in his stead His Gracious Majesty King James."

"God rest the soul of the King!" cried Morgan, lifting his hat from his head. "He was a merry and a gallant gentleman. I know not this James. How if I do not go with you?"

"You have ten minutes in which to decide, sir," answered Hawxherst.

"And then?"

"Then if I don't bring you forth, the men of yonder troop will come in without further order. Eh, Bradley?"

"Quite so, Sir Henry," answered the younger man. "And every avenue of escape is guarded. Yield you, sir; believe me, there's naught else."

"I have ten minutes then," said the old man reflectively, "ten minutes! Hum!"

"You may have," answered the captain curtly, "if you choose to take so long. And I warn you," he added, "that you'd best make use of that time to bid farewell to Lady Morgan or give other order for the charge of your affairs, for 'twill be a long time, I take it, before you are back here again." [Pg 32]

"Lady Morgan is dead, gentlemen, in the room above."

At this young Bradley removed his hat, an example which Hawxherst followed a moment after. They had always felt sorry for the unfortunate wife of the buccaneer.

"As for my affairs, they can wait," continued Morgan slowly. "The game is not played out yet, and perchance I shall have another opportunity to arrange them. Meanwhile, fetch glasses, Carib, from yonder buffet."

He nodded toward a huge sideboard which stood against the wall immediately in the rear of Ensign Bradley, and at the same time shot a swift, meaning glance at the maroon, which was not lost upon him as he moved rapidly and noiselessly in obedience.

"Gentlemen, will you drink with me to our next merry meeting?" he continued, turning to them.

"We're honest soldiers, honorable gentlemen, and we'll drink with no murderer, no traitor!" cried Hawxherst promptly.

"So?" answered Morgan, his eye sparkling with baleful light, although he remained otherwise entirely unmoved.

"And let me remind you," continued the soldier, "that your time is passing." [Pg 33]

"Well, keep fast the glasses, Carib, the gentlemen have no fancy for drinking. I suppose, sirs, that I must fain yield me, but first let me look at your order ere I surrender myself peaceably to you," said the deposed Governor, with surprising meekness.

"Indeed, sir——"

"'Tis my right."

"Well, perchance it may be. There can be no harm in it, I think; eh, Bradley?" queried the captain, catching for the moment his subaltern's eye.

Then, as the latter nodded his head, the former extended the paper to Morgan. At that instant the old buccaneer shot one desperate glance at the maroon, who stood back of the shoulder of the officer with the drawn sword and pistol. As Hawxherst extended the paper, Morgan, with the quickness of an albatross, grasped his wrist with his left hand, jerked him violently forward, and struck him a vicious blow on the temple with the heavy glass decanter, which shivered in his hand. Hawxherst pitched down at the Governor's feet, covered with blood and rum. So powerful had been Morgan's blow that the brains of the man had almost been beaten out. He lay shuddering and quivering on the floor. Quickly as Morgan struck, however, Carib had been quicker. As the glass crashed against the temple of the senior, the maroon had wrenched the pistol from the junior soldier's hand, and before he realized what had happened a cold muzzle was pressed against his forehead. [Pg 34]

"Drop that sword!" cried Morgan instantly, and as the weapon fell upon the floor, he continued, smiling: "That was well done, Black Dog. Quite like old times, eh?"

"Shall I fire?" asked Carib, curling his lips over his teeth in what passed with him for a smile.

"Not yet."

"Your Excellency," gasped poor Bradley, "I didn't want to come. I remonstrated with him a moment since. For God's sake——"

"Silence, sirrah! And how much time have I now, I wonder?" He looked at his watch as he asked the question. "Three minutes! Three minutes between you and instant death, Ensign Bradley, for should one of your men enter the room now you see what you would have to expect, sir."

"Oh, sir, have mercy——"

"Unless you do exactly what I say you will be lying there with that carrion," cried Morgan, kicking the prostrate body savagely with his jewelled shoes.

"What do you want me to do? For God's sake be quick, Your Excellency. Time is almost up. I hear the men move." [Pg 35]

"You are afraid, sir. There still want two minutes——"

"Yes, yes, but——"

"Go to the window yonder," cried the old man contemptuously—whatever he was he was not afraid—"and speak to them. Do you, Carib, stand behind, by the window, well concealed. If he hesitate, if he falter, kill him instantly."

"Pistol or knife?"

"The knife, it makes less noise," cried the buccaneer, chuckling with devilish glee. "Only one minute and a half now, eh, Mr. Bradley?"

"They're coming, they're coming!" whispered Bradley, gasping for breath. "Oh, sir——"

"We still have a minute," answered Morgan coolly. "Now, stop them."

"But how?"

"Tell them that you have captured me; that my wife is dead; that you and Lieutenant Hawxherst will spend the night here and fetch me down to Port Royal in the morning; that I have yielded myself a prisoner. Bid them stay where they are and drink to your health in bottles of rum, which shall be sent out to them, and then to go back to Port Royal and tell the new Governor. And see that your voice does not tremble, sir!"

There was a sudden movement outside.

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"If they get in here," added Morgan quickly, "you are a dead man."

Bradley, with the negro clutching his arm, ran to the window. With the point of his own sword pressed against the back of his neck he repeated the message which Morgan had given him, which was received by the little squadron with shouts of approbation. He turned from the window, pale and trembling. Moistening his lips he whispered:

"I stopped them just in time."

"Well for you that you did," said Morgan grimly. "Come hither! Face that wall! Now stand there! Move but a hair's-breadth, turn your head the thousandth part of a degree, and I run you through," he added, baring his sword. "Rum for the men without, Carib," he added, "and then tell me when they are gone."

While the two were left alone in the room, Morgan amused himself by pricking the unfortunate officer with the point of the weapon, at the same time enforcing immobility and silence by the most ferocious threats of a speedy and cruel death. The men outside drank noisily and presently departed, and the half-breed came back.

"Bind this fool," Morgan commanded briefly. "Then bid the slaves keep close in their cabins on pain of my displeasure—they know what it is. Then fetch the fastest horse in the stable to the front door. Get my riding-boots and cloak, and before you go hand me that little desk yonder. Be quick about it, too, for time presses, although I have more of it than these gentlemen would have allowed me."

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As the maroon, after carefully lashing the officer with a seaman's expertness, rushed out to busy himself in carrying out these commands, Morgan opened the desk which he had handed to him and took from it several rouleaux of gold and a little bag filled with the rarest of precious stones; then he made a careful examination of the body on the floor.

"Not quite dead yet," he murmured, "but there is no use wasting shot or thrust upon him, he won't survive that blow. As for you, sir," looking at the paralyzed ensign, lying bound upon the floor, "you thought you could outwit the old buccaneer, eh? You shall see. I dealt with men when you were a babe in arms, and a babe in arms you are still. Ho! Ho!"

He laughed long and loudly, though there was neither mirth nor merriment in his sinister tones. The blood of the poor listener froze in his veins at the sound of it.

The brief preparations which Morgan had indicated as necessary for the journey were soon made.

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With the point of his own sword pressed against the back of his neck, he repeated the message which Morgan had given him.

He was always promptly obeyed by his own people; the slaves fled his presence when they could as if he had been a pestilence. At a sign from his taciturn body-servant at the open door that the horse was ready, he rose to his feet. [Pg 39-40]

"Shall I kill this one now?" asked the maroon.

Morgan looked at the young man reflectively. The tongue of the ensign clave to the roof of his mouth; the sweat stood out on his forehead; he could not utter a word from fright. He was bound and trussed so tightly that he could not make a move, either. His eyes, however, spoke volumes.

"Well," said Sir Henry deliberately, "it would be a pity to kill him—" he paused; "in a hurry," he added.

"Dead men tell no tales."

"Eh, well, we can take care of that. Just lay him near his friend, lock the doors when I am gone and set the place on fire. The people are all out of the house. See they remain away. 'Twill make a hot, glorious blaze. You know the landing opposite Port Royal?"

The half-breed nodded.

"Meet me there as quick as you can. Lose no time."

"Aye, aye, sah," answered the Carib. "And Lady Morgan, sah?"

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"Let her burn with the other two. She is so saintly she may like the fire, for I am afraid there will be none where she has gone. Good-by, Master Bradley. You allowed me ten minutes. I take it that this house will burn slowly at first, so perhaps you may count upon—let us say—half an hour. I'm generous, you see. Harry Morgan's way! 'Tis a pity you can't live to take my message to Lord Carlingford. The next time he sends any one for me let him send men, not fools and—cowards."

"You villain! You cursed, murdering villain!" gasped Bradley at last.

"To our next meeting, Mr. Bradley, and may it be in a cooler place than you will be in half an hour!"

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CHAPTER II

HOW MASTER BENJAMIN HORNIGOLD, THE ONE-EYED, AGREED TO GO WITH HIS OLD

Close under the towering walls of the old Spanish fort, now for a quarter of a century dominated by the English flag, as if seeking protection from its frowning battlements with their tiers of old-fashioned guns, stood the Blue Anchor tavern. It had been a famous resort for the bold spirits of the evil sort who had made Port Royal the base of their operations in many a desperate sea venture in piracy in the two decades that had just passed; but times had changed, even if men had not changed in them.



The buccaneer had been banished from the Caribbean. Whereupon, with a circumspect prudence, he had extended his operations into the South Seas, where he was farther from civilization, consequently harder to get at, and, naturally, more difficult to control. Since the sack of Panama, twenty-five years before, his fortunes had been rapidly declining. One of the principal agents in promoting his downfall had been the most famous rover of them all. After robbing his companions of most of their legitimate proportion of the spoils of Panama, Sir Henry had bought his knighthood at the hands of the venal Charles, paying for it in treasure, into the origin of which, with his usual careless insouciance, his easy-going majesty had not inquired any too carefully. And the old pirate had settled down, if not to live cleanly at least to keep within the strict letter of the law. There was thereafter nothing he abhorred so thoroughly as buccaneering and the buccaneer—ostensibly, that is.

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Like many a reformed rake this gentle child of hell, when the opportunity came to him with the position of Vice-Governor, endeavored to show the sincerity of his reformation by his zealous persecution. He hanged without mercy such of his old companions in crime as fell into his clutches. They had already vowed vengeance upon him, these sometime brethren of the coast, for his betrayal of their confidence at Panama; they had further resented his honor of knighthood, his cloak of respectability, his assumption of gentility, and now that he hanged and punished right and left without mercy, their anger and animosity were raised to the point of fury, and many of them swore deeply with bitter oaths that if they ever caught him defenceless they would make him pay dearly in torture and torment for these various offences. He knew them well enough to realize their feelings toward him, and blind fate affording him the opportunity of the upper hand he made them rue more bitterly than ever their wild threats against him.

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He had, moreover, so conducted himself in his official position that everybody, good, bad, and indifferent, on the island hated him. Why he had not been assassinated long since was a mystery. But he was a dangerous man to attack. Absolutely fearless, prompt, decisive, resourceful, and with the powers and privileges of the office he held besides, he had so far escaped all the dangers and difficulties of his situation. Charles had constantly befriended him and had refused to give ear either to the reiterated pleas of the islanders for his removal, or to the emphatic representations of the Spanish court, which, in bitter recollection of what he had done—and no more cruel or more successful pirate had ever swept the Caribbean and ravaged the Spanish Main—were persistently urged upon his notice. But with the accession of James the situation was immediately altered. The new monarch had at once acceded to the demand of the Spanish Ambassador, presented anew at this opportune time, and a new Governor of Jamaica was despatched over the sea with orders to arrest Morgan and send him to England. Hawxherst, who, in common with all the officers of the insular army, hated the bloodstained villain whom fortune had placed over them, had solicited Lord Carlingford to allow him to execute the order, with what success we have seen.

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The news of the long-wished-for downfall of the tyrant had been spread abroad and formed the one topic of conversation in Port Royal and the vicinity that day. Now the work of the day was over and, as usual, the Blue Anchor tavern was crowded with men from the frigate and other shipping in the harbor, mingling with others from the purlieu of the town. Fumes of rum and spirits pervaded the tobacco-smoked barroom which served as the main parlor of the inn. It was yet early in the evening, but the crowd, inflamed with liquor, was already in uproarious mood. Over in the corner a young Englishman was singing in a rich, deep voice a new song by a famous poet of London town:

"Let us sing and be merry, dance, joke and rejoice,
With claret and sherry, theorbo and voice!
The changeable world to our joy is unjust,
All treasure's uncertain,
Then down with your dust;
In frolics dispose your pounds, shillings and pence,
For we shall be nothing a hundred years hence.

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We'll sport and be free, with Frank, Betty and Dolly,
Have lobsters and oysters to cure melancholy;
Fish dinners will make a man spring like a flea,
Dame Venus, love's lady,
Was born of the sea;

With her and with Bacchus we'll tickle the sense.
For we shall be past it a hundred years hence."

It was a popular song, evidently, for the whole assembly joined in the chorus—

"In frolics dispose your pounds, shillings and pence,
For we shall be nothing a hundred years hence."

They roared it out in the deep bass voices of the sea, marking the time by hammering in unison upon the oaken tables with their pewter mugs and flagons. The sentiment seemed to suit the company, if the zest with which they sang be any criterion. Care was taken to insure a sufficient pause, too, after the chorus between each of the verses, to permit the drinking, after all the essential part of the evening's entertainment, to be performed without hindrance.

There was one man, however, from the post of honor which he occupied at the head of the table evidently held in high consideration among the habitués of the inn, who did not join in the singing. He was a little man, who made up for his shortness of stature by breadth of shoulder and length of arm. There was an ugly black patch over his left eye; no one had ever seen him without that patch since the day of the assault on the fort at Chagres; an Indian arrow had pierced his eye on that eventful day. Men told how he had gone to the surgeon requesting him to pull it out, and when the young doctor, who had been but a short time with the buccaneers, shrank from jerking the barb out in view of the awful pain which would attend his action, had hesitated, reluctant, the wounded man had deliberately torn out the arrow, and with oaths and curses for the other's cowardice had bound up the wound himself with strips torn from his shirt and resumed the fighting. His courage there, and before and after, although he was an illiterate person and could neither read nor write, had caused him to be appointed boatswain of the ship that had carried Morgan's flag, and he had followed his leader for many years with a blind devotion that risked all and stuck at nothing to be of service to him.

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It had been many years since Master Benjamin Hornigold, coming down from bleak New England because he found his natural bent of mind out of harmony with the habits and customs of his Puritan ancestors, had drifted into buccaneering under the flag of his chief. He was an old man now, but those who felt the force of his mighty arms were convinced that age had not withered him to any appreciable degree.

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Aside from Morgan, Hornigold had loved but one human creature, his younger brother, a man of somewhat different stamp, who had been graduated from Harvard College but, impelled by some wild strain in his blood and by the example of his brother, had joined the buccaneers.

There were many men of gentle blood who were well acquainted with the polite learning of the day among these sea rovers from time to time, and it is related that on that same Panama excursion when "from the silent peak in Darien" they beheld for the first time after their tremendous march the glittering expanse of the South Seas, with white Panama in its green trees before them, the old cry of the famous Ten Thousand, "Thalatta! Thalatta! The sea! The sea!" had burst from many lips.

All his learning and refinement of manner had not prevented young Ebenezer Hornigold from being as bad at heart as his brother, which is saying a great deal, and because he was younger, more reckless, less prudent, than he of riper years, he had incautiously put himself in the power of Morgan and had been hanged with short shrift. Benjamin, standing upon the outskirts of the crowd jesting and roaring around the foot of the gibbet, with a grief and rage in his heart at his impotency, presently found himself hating his old captain with a fierceness proportioned to his devotion in the past. For he had appealed for mercy personally to Morgan by the memory of his former services and had been sternly repulsed and coldly dismissed with a warning that he should look to his own future conduct lest, following in the course of his brother, he should find himself with his neck in the noose.

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Morgan, colossal in his conceit and careless in his courage, thought not to inquire, or, if he gave the subject any consideration at all, dismissed it from his mind as of little moment, as to what was the subsequent state of Hornigold's feelings. Hornigold could have killed Morgan on numberless occasions, but a consuming desire for a more adequate revenge than mere death had taken hold of him, and he deferred action until he could contrive some means by which to strike him in a way that he conceived would glut his obsession of inexpiable hatred.

Hornigold had reformed, outwardly that is, and was now engaged in the useful and innocent business of piloting ships into the harbor, also steering their crews, after the anchors were down, into the Blue Anchor tavern, in which place his voice and will were supreme. He had heard, for Lord Carlingford had made no secret of his orders, that his old master was to be arrested and sent back to England. The news which would have brought joy to a lesser villain, in that it meant punishment, filled him with dismay, for such was the peculiarity of his hatred that he wanted the punishment to come directly from him—through his agency, that is. He desired it to be of such character that it should be neither speedy nor easy, and he lusted most of all that Morgan should know in his last hours—which Hornigold prayed Satan might be long ones—to whom he was indebted for it all.

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And, strange as it may seem, there was still a certain loyalty of a distorted, perverted kind, in the man's breast. No matter what Morgan had done, no one else should punish him but himself. He would even have fought for his sometime chief, were it necessary, against the King or his law, if need be. He was therefore very much disturbed over what he heard. Had it been possible he

would have warned Morgan immediately of his purposed arrest, but he had been detained on the frigate by necessary duties from which he could find no means of escape until too late. He had, however, a high sense of Sir Henry's courage and address. He hoped and believed that he would not be taken by such men as Hawxherst and Bradley; but if he were, Hornigold made up his mind to rescue him.

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There was a little islet in the Caribbean just below Hispaniola, in whose wooded interior still lurked some of the old-time buccaneers, proscribed men, who, from time to time, did pirating in a small way on their own account; just enough to keep their hands in. If the worst came, Hornigold, who with his little pinnace had kept in touch with them secretly, could assemble them for the rescue of their old captain. Then the former Governor, in his power and in their possession, could be disposed of at their leisure and pleasure. All these things had busied the man during the evening, and he sat even now in the midst of the revelry about him, plunged in profound thought.

Unobserved himself, he had taken account of every man who was present. He knew all the habitués of the port, and enjoyed a wide acquaintance among the seamen whose vessels frequented the harbor. He decided there were then in that room perhaps twenty men upon whom he could depend, proper inducement being offered, for almost any sort of service. Among these were five or six superior spirits whom he knew to be tried and true. There was young Teach, the singer of the evening, a drunken, dissolute vagabond, who had been discharged from his last ship for insubordination and a quarrelsome attack upon one of his officers, for which he had narrowly escaped hanging as a mutineer. The man was as bold as a lion, though; he could be trusted. There, too, was Rock Brazilliano, a Portuguese half-breed, and hobnobbing with him was Raveneau de Lussan, a Frenchman—prime seamen and bold fellows both. Further down the table, the huge Dutchman, Velsers, was nodding stupidly over his rum.

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These men and a few others were veterans like Hornigold himself. They were the best of the lot, but for the most part the assemblage was made up of the sweepings of the town, men who had the willingness to do anything no matter how nefarious it might be, their only deterrent being lack of courage. Hornigold's single eye swept over them with a fierce gleam of contempt, yet these were they with whom he must work in case of necessity.

One or two others in whom he reposed confidence, men who composed the crew of his own pinnace, he had sent off early in the evening to Spanish Town to gather what news they could. One of them came in and reported that the squadron of horse which had gone up with the officers to bring back Morgan had come back without him and without the officers. The spy's insignificance prevented him from learning why this was, but hope instantly sprang up in Hornigold's breast upon receipt of this news. Knowing Morgan as he did, he was convinced that he had found some means to dispose of the two officers and send away the cavalry.

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He was not unprepared, therefore, when he saw the tall form of the maroon appearing in the doorway through the smoke. No one else noticed the silent Carib's entry, and he stood motionless until Hornigold's eye fastened upon him. Then by an imperceptible move of his head he indicated a desire to speak with him without the room. The one-eyed nodded slightly in token that he understood, and the maroon vanished as silently as he had come. Waiting a few moments, Hornigold rose from his seat and began threading his way through the boisterous crowd toward the door. Thrusting aside detaining hands and answering rude queries with an old sailor's ready banter, bidding them on no account to cease the festivities because of his departure, and in fact ordering a new draught of rum for all hands, he succeeded in breaking away under cover of the cheers which greeted this announcement.

It was pitch dark outside and he stopped a moment, hesitating as to what he should do. He had no doubt but that the maroon had a message for him from his master. But a second had elapsed when he felt a light touch on his shoulder. His hand went instantly to the seaman's hanger at his side and he faced about promptly. A ready man was Master Hornigold.

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"It's I, bo's'n," whispered a familiar voice.

"You, Black Dog? Where's your master?"

"Yonder."

"Let me see him."

A tall, slender figure muffled in a heavy riding-coat sat in the stern sheets of a small boat in the deepest shadow of one of the silent and deserted piers.

"Captain Morgan?" whispered Hornigold softly, as followed by the maroon he descended the landing stairs leading toward the boat.

"'Tis you, Master Hornigold," answered the man, with an accent of relief in his voice, thrusting the pistol back into his belt as he spoke. He, too, was a ready man with his weapons and one not to be caught napping in any emergency.

"Me it is, sir," answered the boatswain, "and ready to serve my old captain."

"You heard the news?"

"I heard it on the frigate this afternoon."

"Why did you not send me warning?"

"I had no chance. I'd 'a' done it, sir, if I could have fetched away."

"Well, all's one. I've laid those two landlubbers by the heels. Eh, Carib?"

"Where are they, sir?"

"I might make a guess, for I left them bound and the house blazing."

"'Tis like old times!"

"Ay! I've not forgot the old tricks."

"No, sir. And what's to do now?"

"Why, the old game once more."

"What? You don't mean——"

"I do. What else is there left for me? Scuttle me, if I don't take it out of the Dons! It's their doing. They've had a rest for nigh twenty years. We'll let it slip out quietly among the islands that Harry Morgan's afloat once more and there's pickings to be had on the Spanish Main—wine and women and pieces of eight. Art with me?"

"Ay, of course. But we lack a ship."

"There's one yonder, man," cried Morgan, pointing up the harbor, where the lights of the *Mary Rose* twinkled in the blackness.

"To be sure the ship is there, but——"

"But what?"

"We've no force. The old men are gone."

"I am here," answered Morgan, "and you and Black Dog. And there are a few others left. Teach is new, but will serve; I heard his bull voice roaring out from the tavern. And de Lussan and Velsers, and the rest. I've kept sight of ye. Curse it all, I let you live when I might have hanged you."

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"You did, captain, you did. You didn't hang everybody—but you didn't spare, either."

It would have been better for the captain if it had been lighter and he could have seen the sudden and sharp set of Master Hornigold's jaws, which, coupled with the fierceness which flamed into his one eye as he hissed out that last sentence, might have warned him that it would be safer to thrust his head into the lion's mouth than altogether to trust himself to his whilom follower. But this escaped him in the darkness.

"Listen," he said quickly. "This is my plan. In the morning when Hawxherst and Bradley do not appear, the new Governor will send more men. They will find the house burned down. No one saw us come hither. There will be in the ruins the remains of three bodies."

"Three?"

"Yes. My Lady Morgan's."

"Did you kill her?"

"I didn't have to. They'll think that one of them is mine. No hue or cry will be raised and no search made for me. Do you arrange that the crew of the *Mary Rose* be given liberty for the evening yonder at the Blue Anchor. They've not been ashore yet, I take it?"

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"No, but they will go to-morrow."

"That's well. Meanwhile gather together the bold fellows who have stomach for a cruise and are willing to put their heads through the halter provided there are pieces of eight on the other side, and then we'll take the frigate to-morrow night and away for the Spanish Main. That will give us a start. We'll pick up what we can along the coast first, then scuttle the ship, cross the Isthmus, seize another and have the whole South Seas before us—Peru, Manila, wherever we will."

"The King has a long arm."

"Yes, and other kings have had long arms too, I take it, but they have not caught Harry Morgan, nor ever shall. Come, man, wilt go with me?"

"Never fear," answered Hornigold promptly. "I've been itching for a chance to cut somebody's throat."

He did not say it was Morgan's throat, but the truth and sincerity in his voice carried conviction to the listening captain.

"Thou bloody butcher!" he laughed grimly. "There will be plenty of it anon."

"Where will you lay hid," asked the boatswain, "until to-morrow night?"

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"I have thought of that," said Morgan promptly. "I think the best place will be the cabin of your pinnace. I'll just get aboard, Black Dog here and I, and put to sea. To-morrow night at this hour we'll come back here again and you will find us here at the wharf."

"A good plan, Master Morgan," cried Hornigold, forgetting the title as the scheme unfolded itself to him. "What's o'clock, I wonder?"

As he spoke the sound of a bell tapped softly came floating over the quiet water from the *Mary Rose*.

"Four bells," answered Morgan listening; "at ten of the clock, then, I shall be here."

"Leave the rest to me, sir," answered Hornigold.

"I shall. That will be your boat yonder?"

"Ay. Just beyond the point."

"Is anybody aboard of her?"

"No one."

"Is there rum and water enough for one day?"

"Plenty. In the locker in the cuddy."

"Good! Come, Carib. Until to-morrow night, then!"

"Ay, ay, sir," said Hornigold, leaning over the pier and watching the boat fade into a black blur on the water as it drew away toward the pinnacle.

"He's mine, by heaven, he's mine!" he whispered under his breath as he turned and walked slowly up to the house. [Pg 59]

Yet Master Hornigold meant to keep faith with his old captain. He was sick and tired of assumed respectability, of honest piloting of ships to the harbor, of drinking with worthy merchantmen or the King's sailors. The itch for the old buccaneering game was hard upon him. To hear the fire crackle and roar through a doomed ship, to lord it over shiploads of terrified men and screaming women, to be satiated with carnage and drunk with liquor, to dress in satins and velvets and laces, to let the broad pieces of eight run through his grimy fingers, to throw off restraint and be a free sailor, a gentleman rover, to return to the habits of his earlier days and revel in crime and sin—it was for all this that his soul lusted again.

He would betray Morgan, yet a flash of his old admiration for the man came into his mind as he licked his lips like a wolf and thought of the days of rapine. There never was such a leader. He had indeed been the terror of the seas. Under no one else would there be such prospects for successful piracy. Yes, he would do all for him faithfully, up to the point of revenge. Morgan's plan was simple and practicable. De Lussan, Teach, Velsers and the rest would fall in with it gladly. There would be enough rakehelly, degraded specimens of humanity, hungry and thirsty, lustful and covetous, in Port Royal—which was the wickedest and most flourishing city on the American hemisphere at the time—to accompany them and insure success, provided only there would be reward in women and liquor and treasure. He would do it. They would all go a-cruising once more, and then—they would see. [Pg 60]

He stayed a long time on the wharf, looking out over the water, arranging the details of the scheme outlined by Morgan so brilliantly, and it was late when he returned to the parlor of the Blue Anchor Inn. Half the company were drunk on the floor under the tables. The rest were singing, or shouting, or cursing, in accordance with their several moods. Above the confusion Hornigold could hear Teach's giant voice still roaring out his reckless refrain; bitter commentary on their indifference it was, too—

"Though life now is pleasant and sweet to the sense,
We'll be damnably moldy a hundred years hence."

"Ay," thought the old buccaneer, pausing in the entrance, for the appositeness of the verses impressed even his unreflective soul, "it will be all the same in a hundred years, but we'll have one more good cruise before we are piped down for the long watch in."

He chuckled softly and hideously to himself at the fatalistic idea. [Pg 61]

By his orders, enforced by the vigorous use of seamen's colts, the inn servants at once cleared the room of the vainly protesting revellers. Those whose appearance indicated a degree of respectability which promised payment for their accommodation, were put to bed; the common sort were bundled unceremoniously out on the strand before the door and left to sober up as best they might in the soft tropic night. Teach, Kaveneau, and the Brazilian were detained for conference with the boatswain. To these worthies, therefore, Hornigold unfolded Morgan's plan, which they embraced with alacrity, promising each to do his share. Velsers was too stupidly drunk to be told anything, but they knew they could count upon him without fail. [Pg 62]

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH SIR HENRY MORGAN FINDS HIMSELF AT THE HEAD OF A CREW ONCE MORE



he next morning, after waiting a reasonable time for a message from the two soldiers at Spanish Town, Lord Carlingford, the new Governor, who had taken up his residence temporarily at Port Royal, summoned his attendants, and himself repaired to the seat of Government to ascertain why no further report had been received from his officers. Great was his astonishment when he found that the residence of the Vice-Governor had been destroyed by fire during the night. The frightened slaves could tell nothing. Morgan and Carib had taken care that no one had marked their departure. Consequently when the search of the ruins revealed the remains of three bodies, so badly charred as to be unrecognizable, it was naturally inferred at first that they were those of the buccaneer and the two unfortunate officers. It was known among the people of the place, however, that Lady Morgan had been seriously ill, so ill that she could not have been removed, and there were some who suspected that one of the bodies was hers and that the arch-fiend himself had by some means disposed of the officers and escaped. Therefore a hue and cry was raised for him and a strict search instituted by order of the Governor, who, after setting affairs in motion, returned to Port Royal.

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Troops were accordingly ordered out, and even details of surly seamen, growling at being deprived of their accustomed shore liberty, were detailed from the frigate, which happened to be the only war vessel in commission in the harbor. Hornigold, Raveneau, and one or two of the others known to be former companions of the buccaneer, were closely interrogated, but they stoutly declared they did not know his whereabouts and had seen nothing of him. Later in the afternoon it was observed that Hornigold's pinnace was not in the harbor. Indeed, with cunning adroitness that master mariner himself called attention to the fact, cursing the while his old commander for his alleged theft of the boat, and declaring his willingness to join in the search for him. It was known to the authorities that the execution of the boatswain's brother by Morgan had shattered the old intimacy which subsisted between them; consequently his protestations were given credence and suspicion of collusion was diverted from him.

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Lord Carlingford finally determined to send the *Mary Rose* to sea in an endeavor to overhaul the pinnace, in the hope that the former Vice-Governor might be found on her, although the chances of success were but faint. The frigate, however, was not provisioned or watered for a cruise, after her long voyage from England. There had been considerable scurvy and other sickness on the ship and she was in no condition to weigh anchor immediately; she would have to be re-supplied and the sick men in her crew replaced by drafts from the shore. Besides, in accordance with the invariable custom, the great majority of the men had been given shore leave for that afternoon and evening, and those few who were not on duty were carousing at the Blue Anchor Inn and similar taverns and would be utterly unable to work the ship, should they be called upon to do so, without being given a chance to sober up. This would take time, and Lord Carlingford upon the representations of his sea officers decided to wait until the morrow before commencing work. One secret of Morgan's success was the promptness with which he struck. Nobler and better men could have learned a lesson from this old buccaneer, notably the Governor.

As he could do so, not only personally but through his able lieutenants, Hornigold busied himself during the day and the preceding night in enlisting as vicious a gang of depraved ruffians as could be gathered together in what was perhaps the wickedest city in the world. It had been decided after conference between the leaders that there was no place within the confines of Port Royal itself where so many men could meet without exciting suspicion. He had accordingly appointed a rendezvous for the night across the narrow entrance to the harbor, opposite the fort, under the trees which overshadowed the strand, some distance back from high-water mark. Singly or in groups of two or three, the men had gone across in boats after sunset, successfully eluding observation, for the night was moonless and very dark.

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There was no room, indeed, for suspicion on the part of the authorities, save in the bare fact of the possible escape of Morgan; but it had been twenty years since that worthy had gone buccaneering, and, except in the minds of his former companions and participants, much of the character of his exploits had passed out of mind. No special watch was kept, therefore, in fort or town or on the ship. Morgan was gone certainly, but nothing was feared from a single proscribed man.

There was rum in plenty under the trees on the point, but care was taken by Rock Braziliano, Raveneau, and the others, even including Velsers, that no one should drink enough to lose entire control of his faculties or to become obstreperous. Just enough was given to make the timid bold, and the hardy reckless. They knew the value of, and on occasion could practise, abstinence, those old buccaneers, and they were determined to keep their men well in hand. No fires were lighted, no smoking permitted. Strict silence was enjoined and enforced. It was perhaps ten o'clock before all were assembled.

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When morning had cleared their brains of the rum they had taken, there had been ferocious opposition on the part of the older men. Not that they objected to buccaneering. They were eager for the chance once more, but the memory of Morgan's betrayals of his old comrades rankled deep. There were many beside Hornigold who had promised themselves the luxury of vengeance upon their old commander. There were none, however, who had so dwelt upon it as the boatswain, nor were there any whose animosity and determination compared to his fierce hatred. He was therefore able, at last, to persuade them into a surly willingness to accept Morgan as their captain in this new enterprise. Indeed, without him they could do nothing, for there was no one who possessed the ability or experience to lead them save he. The best men of the old stamp were now in the South Seas and far away; they had been driven from the Caribbean. It was not difficult for Hornigold to show them that it must be Morgan or no one.

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Their feelings of animosity were, perforce, sunk beneath the surface, although they smouldered still within their breasts. They would go with him, they said. But let him look to himself, they swore threateningly. If he betrayed them again, there were men among them who would kill him as remorselessly as they would stamp on a centipede. If he behaved himself and the expedition on which he was to lead them proved successful, they might forgive him—all but old Hornigold. Truth to tell, there was no one among them who felt himself so wronged or so badly treated as the one-eyed envenomed sailor.

The bulk of the party, which numbered perhaps one hundred men, were simply plain, ordinary thieves, cut-throats, broken-down seamen, land sharks and rascals. Not much was to be expected of them. They were not of the stuff of which the old-time buccaneers had been made, but they were the best to be obtained at that time in Port Royal. Even they would not have been so easily assembled had they realized quite what was expected of them. They knew, of course, that they were committing themselves to some nefarious undertaking, but to each recruit had been vouchsafed only enough information to get him to come to the rendezvous—no more. They were a careless, drunken, dissolute lot.

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By Hornigold's orders they were told off in five parties of about twenty each, commanded respectively by himself, Velsers, Raveneau, the Brazilian, and the last by Teach, who, though the youngest of the leaders, had a character for daring wickedness that would stop at nothing. With much difficulty the boatswain had succeeded in obtaining five boats, each capable of carrying one band. Every one brought his own arms, and in general these men did not lack a sufficiency of weapons. Those who were deficient, however, were supplied from a scanty stock which the leaders had managed to procure.

All was in readiness, when one of the men who had been stationed on the extreme edge of the beach toward the channel reported the approach of a small boat looking like the pinnace.

The wind, fortunately for the enterprise, happened to be blowing fresh out of the harbor and it was necessary for the pinnace to beat up toward the entrance. She showed no lights, but, as she tacked in close to the shore, between the watcher and the lights of the town, he observed her. The boat was handled with consummate skill; she dropped anchor and hauled down her sails noiselessly just abreast the pier which had been appointed the rendezvous by the two men on the night before. As soon as Hornigold learned of the approach he took a small boat, leaving Velsers in command of the band on shore, and repaired with the other leaders to the wharf on the other side. As the boat approached the wharf it was hailed in a sharp whisper.

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"Who comes?" cried the voice on shore.

"Hornigold!" answered the boatswain in a low tone, as the boat swept alongside.

"So, 'tis you, is it?" cried Morgan, attended by the maroon as usual, again putting his pistol back into his belt. "Seeing so many of you in the skiff, I feared a trap until you gave the word."

"I've brought along Raveneau, the Brazilian, and young Teach," said the boatswain.

"Welcome, my hearties, all!" said the Vice-Governor softly. "We're off to the Spanish Main with a good ship, plenty of liquor beneath the hatches, brave hearts to run her. There will be plenty of pickings meet for any man. Are you with me?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"We are," answered one and another.

The place where they stood was lonely and deserted at that time of night, but Hornigold suggested that they immediately repair to the other side, there to perfect their further plans. Indeed, they had no plans as yet. There was not head enough among them to concoct the details of the scheme, although no better instruments for an expedition than the chief and those assembled under him could be gathered together. They had waited for Morgan.

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"You speak well," answered the captain. "Are all preparations made?"

"All we could make without you, captain," replied Hornigold as the party re-entered the boat.

"How many men have you gathered?"

"About five score."

"Boats?"

"Five."

"Will they carry all?"

"With a little crowding."

"Who leads each boat?"

"I, one, sir, with your permission; Raveneau here, another; the Brazilian, the third; young Teach, a fourth, and Velsers—"

"Where is he?"

"With the rest of the men—the fifth."

"Good! Are they all armed?"

"Every man has a sword and a pistol at least."

"What of the men?"

"A poor lot," answered Teach, recklessly. "A dastardly crew."

"Will they fight, think ye?"

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"Curse me, they'll have to fight; we'll make them!" said Hornigold.

"Do they know what's up?"

"Not exactly," answered Raveneau, the Frenchman, a man of good birth and gentle manners, but as cruel and ruthless a villain as any that ever cut a throat or scuttled a ship. "Have no fear, captain," he continued smoothly. "Once we start them, they will have to fight."

"Did you ever know me to show fear, de Lussan?" cried the captain bending forward and staring at the Frenchman, his eyes glittering in the darkness like those of a wildcat.

"No, captain."

"No, nor did any other man," answered Morgan, and from where he sat Hornigold marked the little dialogue and swore in his heart that this man who boasted so should beg for his life at his hand, with all the beseeching pity of the veriest craven, before he finished with him. But for the present he said nothing. After a short pause, Morgan resumed:

"Have they suspected my escape?"

"They have," answered the boatswain. "They found the remains of the three bodies in the burned house this morning. At first they thought one of them was yours, but they decided after a while that one was a woman, and they guessed that you had made away with the officers and escaped. I told them you had stolen my pinnace and got away."

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"You did, eh?"

"Yes."

"And he swore and cursed you roundly, captain," interposed the Brazilian chuckling maliciously. "Aye, sir, he swore if he got hands on you he would give you up."

Morgan turned this time to Hornigold. He was by no means sure of his position. He knew the enmity of these men, and he did not know how far their cupidity or their desire to take up the old life once more under such fortunate auspices as would be afforded under his command would restrain them.

"Master Ben Hornigold, said ye that?" he queried. "Would ye betray me?"

His hand stole to his waist and his fingers closed around his pistol grip.

"No fear, captain," answered that worthy composedly, sustaining the captain's searching gaze. A braver man never stepped a deck than he. "I did it to divert their attention. You see, they fancied at first that we old sea-dogs might have something to do with your escape, but I undeceived them. They reckoned that you had been hard on us and that we might be hard on ye——"

"No more of this, gentlemen, the past is gone. We begin again," cried Morgan fiercely. "And mark me, the man who betrays Harry Morgan will not live many minutes to boast of it! I'd kill him if he sat on the steps of a throne. Easy there!" he called out to the oarsmen, assuming the command as by right, while the boat's keel grated on the shingle. "All out now and lead the way. Nay, gentlemen, you shall all precede me. Carib, here, will bring up the rear. And it may be well for you to keep your weapons in your belts."

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Much impressed, the little party disembarked and walked rapidly toward the place of assemblage, under the trees. Morgan and the maroon came last, each of them with a bared sword and cocked pistol.

"Lads," said Hornigold, as they approached the men, "here's your captain, Sir Henry Morgan."

"The Governor!" cried one and another, in surprise and alarm. The man had been a terror to evildoers too poor to bribe.

"Nay, men, Governor no more," Morgan answered promptly. "A free sailor who takes the sea against the Spanish Dons. We'll go buccaneering as in the old days. These men here," pointing to the group of officers, "can tell you what it means. You have heard tales of the jolly roving life of the brethren-of-the-coast. We'll do a little picking in the Caribbean, then over the Isthmus, and then down into the South Seas. There's wine and women and treasure to be had for the taking. The Spaniards are cowards. Let them hear that Harry Morgan is once more on the sea under the Jolly Roger and they will tremble from Darien down to the Straits of Magellan. It will be fair play and the old shares. Who's with me?"

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"I!" "I!" "I!" broke from the bolder spirits of the crowd, and the rest, catching the contagion,

finally joined in the acclaim.

"Easy," said the captain, "lest we be heard. Hornigold, is there liquor?"

"Plenty, sir."

"Let each man have a noble draught, then to the boats."

"But, captain," spoke up Sawkins, one of the boldest recruits, who was not in the secret, "be ye goin' buccaneerin' in boats? Whar's the ship?"

"I have a ship in the harbor," cried Morgan, "well found and provided."

"Ay, but what ship?"

"Confusion, sir!" shouted Morgan. "Begin ye by questioning me? Into the boat with your comrades! Velsers, de Lussan, Rock see that the men get into the boats as soon as they have their dram. And hark ye, gentlemen, a word with ye!" calling them apart while the rest were being served. "Put the boldest men in the stern sheets with yourselves, the rest at the oars, and do you have your weapons ready. The *Mary Rose* lies just within the bar. You, Velsers and Rock, gain the fo'c'sl from larboard and starboard. You, Teach and Raveneau, board at the different gangways. Hornigold, I'll go in your boat and we'll attend to the cabin. Let all be done without noise. No pistols, use the blade. Take no prisoners and waste no time. If we gain the deck without difficulty, and I think we can, clap to the hatch covers and we'll cut cable and get under way at once."

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The men had been embarking in the boats rather reluctantly as he spoke, but presently all was ready. Finally Hornigold and then Morgan with the maroon stepped into the last boat, first making sure there were no stragglers left behind, and Morgan gave the command:

"Shove off!"

Sawkins, the bold spirit who had spoken before, presumed, in spite of the commander's threat, to open his mouth again as the boats slowly left the beach, rowing through the passage and up the harbor against the ebb just beginning; he pulled the stroke oar in Hornigold's boat.

"Before I go further," he cried, "I want to know what ship we're goin' aboard of."

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"Ay!" came in a subdued roar from the men behind him, who only needed a leader to back out of the enterprise, which, as it threatened to involve fighting, began to seem not quite so much to their taste. "What ship?"

"The frigate," answered Hornigold shortly.

"What! The *Mary Rose*! The King's ship!" cried the men, ceasing to row. In an instant Morgan's pistol was out. His motion was followed by Hornigold and the maroon.

"Row, you dogs!" he cried fiercely.

The stroke oarsman hesitated, although the others tried to pick up the stroke.

"I give you one minute, then I blow out your brains, pull out the plug in this boat, and we'll all go to hell together," said Morgan truculently to the recalcitrant men.

"Row, for your life's sake!" cried the man behind Sawkins, hitting him in the back with the haft of the oar.

"It's the King's ship!"

"What do we care for the King?" said Morgan. "He is the law, and none of us love the law. Two-thirds of her crew are drunk, t'other third are ashore or sick. They are unprepared, asleep. There'll be naught but the anchor watch. One sharp blow, and we have the frigate—then away. What fear ye, lads?"

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By such words as these, but more by the threatening appearance of the weapons pointed from the stern sheets, Morgan inspirited his men; and by similar language and threats, the men in the other boats did the same. After rowing a short distance the flotilla separated. Those approaching from the farther side of the ship necessarily made a wide détour, for which the others waited, so they would all arrive simultaneously. After a suitable time the order was passed softly to give way again. In perfect silence, broken only by the "cheep" of the oars in the locks, the five boats swept down on the doomed frigate.

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CHAPTER IV

WHICH TELLS HOW THE "MARY ROSE" FRIGATE CHANGED MASTERS AND FLAGS



he *Mary Rose* was a ship with a history. The battle roster of the English navy had borne many of her name. In each instance she had been found in the thickest of the fighting. The present vessel was an old ship, having been built some thirty years before, but she was still staunch and of a model which combined strength with speed. The



most conspicuous expedition she had participated in had been a desperate defence of a convoy in the Mediterranean against seven Sallee rovers, in which, after a hard engagement lasting four hours, the *Mary Rose* triumphed decisively without losing a single sail of her convoy. A rude song was made about the action, and the two lines of the ballad, summing up the results, were painted around the wheel:

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"Two we burnt, and two we sank, and two did run away,
And one we carried to Leghorn Roads, to show we'd won the day."

The commander of the ship on this memorable and heroic occasion had been knighted on his return to England, and on the accession of James had been sent to Jamaica with Lord Carlingford as Vice-Governor, to take command of the naval station and supersede Morgan. Admiral Sir John Kempthorne was an elderly man at this time, but his spirit was the same that had enabled him to withstand so successfully the overwhelming onslaught of the Algerine pirate ships.

The English navy, however, was then in a state of painful decay. The famous Test Act, which excluded James from the naval service while he was Duke of York, because he was a Roman Catholic, had deprived the navy of its most influential and able friend. The greedy rapacity with which Charles II. had devoted the money assigned by the Commons for the support of the fleet to his own lustful and extravagant purposes, the favoritism and venality which he allowed in the administration of the Admiralty, and the neglect with which he viewed the representations of Pepys and others as to the condition of his fleets, had reduced the navy of England, which had won such immortal glory under Blake, to the very lowest depth it ever reached. The ships were in bad repair and commanded by landsmen who shirked going to sea; they were ill-found, the wages of the seamen not paid—in short, they presented pictures of demoralization as painful as they were unusual.

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Kempthorne, having been a tried and a successful naval commander in his younger days, had striven, with some success so far as his own ship was concerned, to stem the prevailing tide of ruin, and the *Mary Rose* was perhaps one of the best frigates in the service, which, however, was not saying a great deal. He could not, of course, better the character of the crew which had been provided for him, nor could he entirely re-supply the ship, or make good her faulty and deficient equipment, but he did the best he could. Under ordinary circumstances he could have given a good account of himself if engaged with even the perfectly appointed ships of the Dutch Republic, or of the Grand Monarch himself. Indeed, in spite of the horrible degeneracy, the prestige of victory was still, as it has ever been, with England. King James, a successful, even brilliant naval commander in his youth, had decided to rehabilitate the navy with a view to putting it on its old footing, and with that object in view he had sent one of his best admirals across the sea to the important island of Jamaica, then the headquarters of the West India Squadron.

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Kempthorne had welcomed the duty, and had determined that so far as the station at Port Royal was concerned he would make it the model one of the colonies, of the kingdom itself for that matter, provided he were sustained by the King as had been promised. Lord Carlingford, with the zeal of a new appointee, had promised his coöperation.

The admiral was seated in the cabin of the frigate that night cogitating upon his plans, when his thoughts were interrupted by the rattle of oars, indicating the arrival of a boat. The sound of the approaching boat came faintly through the open stern windows of the cabin under the high poop-deck.

The ship was more or less deserted. The sick men had been put ashore; most of the crew, and the officers as well, had followed them. They would not be back until the morrow, when Sir John had orders to get away in pursuit of Hornigold's pinnace. With the captain in the cabin, however, was the old master of the ship, a man who had been promoted to that rank after the famous fight with the Algerines because of his gallantry in that action. Kempthorne was consulting with him about the necessary arrangements before sailing the next day.

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As the admiral heard the noise made by the oars in the oarlocks he raised his voice, and calling a sentry, for there was half a platoon of soldiers on board who had not yet been allowed liberty (the beginnings of the Royal Marine of England, by the way), he bade him ascertain if the approaching boat was that containing the Governor. It was still early evening, and Lord Carlingford had announced his intention of sleeping in the ship, for the weather was intensely warm and he thought it might be cooler in the harbor than in the crowded low-lying town of Port Royal.

At the same time the admiral arose, buckled on his sword, and made ready to go on deck to meet Lord Carlingford, should it prove to be his expected visitor. Pausing a moment to say a final word to the master, he was conscious of something striking the ship. Before he could formulate the idea that a boat must have been hit in the bends, there were several similar shocks. The old master, who happened to be unarmed, stepped forward.

"That will be a boat, sir," he said quickly, "striking against the side of the ship. There's another, and another!"

His voice indicated surprise and some apprehension. What could it be?

"Let us go on deck at once," said Kempthorne, stepping forward. As he did so the silence was broken by a wild, terrified cry. A moment after, the sentry on the quarter-deck outside the entrance to the poop cabin fired his piece. The shot was followed by the sound of a fierce blow, and then a heavy fall. A sharp, imperious voice cried quickly:

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"The ship is ours! Waste no time! Overboard with him! Clap to the hatch covers!"

The necessity for concealment outside was apparently at an end. The heavy covers were flung down upon the hatches and secured. The ship was filled with a confused babel of many voices and trampling feet. At the sound of the shot, the admiral and the master sprang to the door, but before they could pass the entrance it was flung violently open, and a man richly dressed after the fashion of Jamaica, followed by a tall, savage-looking half-breed, a compound of negro and Indian, clad in a gorgeous livery, each with pistol and sword, sprang into the room and forced the two men back. As soon as he could recover himself Kempthorne whipped out his sword. He found himself covered, however, as did the master, with a pistol.

"Throw down your sword!" cried Morgan fiercely, "and yield yourselves without quarter."

"Who are you that ask?"

"Sir Henry Morgan."

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"You bloody villain!" cried Kempthorne. "Dare you attempt to take the King's ship?"

"That for the King!" answered Morgan, waving his sword. "Who are you?"

"Sir John Kempthorne, Admiral and Vice-Governor of Jamaica."

"You would fain fill my station, would you, sir?"

"I would not descend to the station of a pirate, a robber, a murderer, a——"

"S'death, silence!" roared Morgan furiously. "The ship is ours! I've a message for the King. Wilt carry it?"

"I would not insult my royal master by carrying a message from such as you."

"You will have it!" shouted Morgan, white with rage, lunging forward at him.

Their blades crossed in an instant, and at the same moment the old master, reckless of what happened, flung himself between the two. There was a roar from Carib's pistol, and the old man fell. As Kempthorne relaxed his guard slightly in the confusion Morgan ran him through. The admiral fell so suddenly that he jerked the blade, buried in his breast, out of the buccaneer's hand.

"God—" he gasped, as he lay upon the body of the old sailor, "God—save the—King."

"Would'st sit in my place, eh?" cried Morgan, laughing truculently as he turned on his heel and left the cabin.

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Beneath the hatches, the platoon of soldiers and the men there imprisoned were yelling and making a tremendous racket. They were helpless, however, and could do nothing. The men of the boarding parties were clustered in groups forward and aft and around the closed passageways into the interior of the ship, waiting for the next order.

The noise and confusion which had followed the sentry's bold shot had awakened the attention of the people of the town. Lights twinkled on the ramparts of the fort, and the long roll of a drum could be heard coming faintly up the harbor against the wind. Lord Carlingford had just entered his boat to board the ship. There was not a moment to lose.

"Hornigold, go forward with your men to the fore-castle. Velsers, come you hither with yours for the after guard. Teach, to the fore; Raveneau, to the main; and Rock, to the mizzenmast. Loose sail. Lively now. We must get out of this before the fort's awake," cried Morgan.



**Their blades crossed in an instant....
There was a roar from Carib's pistol, and
the old man fell.**

Instantly the shrouds were covered with nimble forms making their way aloft where the wide yard-arms stretched far over the sea. The men were in good spirits. The capture of the ship had been so easy; there had been only the anchor watch and the sentry on deck to deal with, and they had been murdered unsuspecting, although the cabin sentry had killed one of the attacking party and wounded another before he went down. They jumped with alacrity, therefore, to obey their captain's commands. As the ponderous sheets of canvas fell from the yards, the men lay down from aloft, and sheets and halyards were manned, the cable that moored the vessel to the anchor was cut, the ship swung to starboard, the yards were braced in, and she began to slip through the water toward the narrow mouth of the harbor. There were other war vessels in the harbor, but they were all dismantled and laid up in ordinary, so the buccaneers had no pursuit to fear.

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The guns of the fort commanded the harbor mouth, and under ordinary circumstances would have made it impossible for a ship to enter or leave without permission. The mouth was narrow and dangerous, but the best pilot in the West Indies stood forward leaning over the knightheads, conning the ship. Raveneau and Velsers, than whom no better seamen ever held a spoke, by Morgan's orders were stationed at the wheel to steer the frigate. Rock and Teach distributed the best of the men among the guns of the spar-deck battery on the port side. As was usual, the guns were already charged. There were no loggerheads available, no matches with which to fire them, but Morgan instructed those who seemed to have some skill in gunnery, whom he placed in temporary charge of the cannon, how to fire them by snapping their pistols at the touch-holes, which were primed from a powder horn that had been brought by the pirates.

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The land breeze was fresh and strong, and the *Mary Rose* vindicated her claim to be considered a fast sailer. She fairly ripped down the harbor, threading her way through the channel under Hornigold's nice pilotage until she came near to the narrow entrance. By Morgan's orders each man remained motionless at the place where he had been stationed, and the ship, so far as human noise was concerned, was as still as death. Even the soldiers below, finding no attention paid to their cries, had subsided into comparative quiet. The silence was broken only by the creaking of cordage, the dashing of water against the bows, and the groaning of the timbers. Ever and anon Hornigold's deep voice, crying "Larboard" or "Starboard" as the case might be, rolled along the deck to the watchful men gripping the wheel. Suddenly the old buccaneer cried out sharply:

"There's a boat right ahead, sir."

"Run her down!" answered Morgan instantly.

"Ay, ay! Starboard! Starboard again! Let her go off another half-point. Steady! Very well dyce. Now! Meet her! Meet her!"

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The ship swept around slightly and rushed directly at the boat. It was the boat of the Governor.

Instantly wild cries arose from the men on the thwarts. They were stopped by a stern voice.

"Ahoy, the *Mary Rose*!"

Silence.

"Ahoy, the frigate! What are you doing? Where is Admiral Kempthorne?"

At that instant the soldiers beneath the hatches suddenly resumed their commotion, thus apprising the men in the boat that something was sadly wrong.

"Larboard your helm!" cried a voice from the boat, "or you'll be on us. Who's in command? What are you about?"

"Sir Harry Morgan!" shouted a voice out of the darkness. "And we mean to run you down."

"Back water, for God's sake! Stern, all!" cried Lord Carlingford to the paralyzed rowers; but before they could move the looming bow of the frigate was upon them. Carlingford had risen in his boat before the collision, and with dauntless courage he shook his bared sword in the darkness toward the ship.

"The King will triumph!" he cried.

"You can go to hell!" shouted Morgan, "with Hawxherst and Bradley and Kempthorne and all who oppose me." [Pg 91]

A terrible, smashing crash cut short his words, and, amid the ripping, tearing sound of the parting timbers of the overridden boat, and shouts, cries, and appeals for mercy, the *Mary Rose* swept on. One or two beneath her forefoot leaped frantically at the bobstays, but they were driven from their holds by savage pike thrusts from Hornigold's men.

A wild yell of elation broke from the pirates. They were completely possessed by their success now, but Morgan stopped the noise in an instant.

"Silence!" roared the captain. "We are not yet free. Back to your stations! Stand by the larboard battery!"

At that time the entrance to the harbor was very narrow, and the channel swept close under the Port Royal shore. Everybody in the town knew that something had happened on the frigate. The garrison of the fort was out and the guns were loaded and bore fair upon the channel. Softly, for they were within earshot distance of the fort, Morgan passed the word to train the guns of the battery on the parapet of the fort. He also told off all the men with small arms to line the side, with instructions for them to fire at the port-holes of the fort as they passed, and he charged every one, under pain of death, to keep all fast until he gave the word. Hornigold bent all his mind to getting the ship safely out of the harbor. Two or three reliable men were stationed in the gangway, whose sole business it was to repeat his commands without fail during the confusion, no matter what happened. They were right in the entrance now, and coming opposite the fort. The men below were still keeping up a great noise, but a hail which came across the water from the rampart was entirely audible, the distance not being more than half pistol shot. [Pg 92]

"Hello, the *Mary Rose*! Hello, the frigate!"

"Ay, ay! What is it?"

"Where are you going? Where's Lord Carlingford?"

There was no answer. The rapidly moving ship was fairly abreast the fort now. In thirty seconds she would be beyond it.

"We have killed the Governor and Kempthorne, and this is the ship of Sir Henry Morgan, bound for the Spanish Main on a buccaneering cruise. Fire!"

A perfect hail of shot at point blank range belched forth from the twenty-four guns of the larboard battery of the onrushing ship. In the surprise and confusion caused by this murderous discharge at short range, the frigate slipped by, and although every gun in the fort, whether it bore or not, was finally discharged by the infuriated soldiery, no serious damage was done to the ship. Here and there a man fell. The starboard main topsail sheet was cut, a few ropes parted, but that was all. Pouring a perfect hail of musketry and pistol fire upon the surprised garrison, which did execution, the frigate slipped through the channel. Before the cannon could be reloaded they were out of range. There before them lay the open sea, bounded to the southward by the rich and unprotected cities of the Spanish Main. [Pg 93]

"We're out of the harbor, sir," cried Hornigold, coming aft to where Morgan stood triumphant on the poop.

"That's well!" said the commander. "Secure the guns and muster the crew. We'll divide into watches and bear away to the southward."

"Long live Sir Henry Morgan, King of the Buccaneers!" cried a voice out of the darkness, and amid a tremendous roar of cheers the vessel swept away, leaving the lights of Port Royal twinkling faintly in the distance far behind them. [Pg 94]

BOOK II

THE CRUISE OF THE BUCCANEERS AND WHAT BEFEL THEM ON THE SEAS

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CHAPTER V

HOW THE "MARY ROSE" OVERHAULED THREE SPANISH TREASURE SHIPS

Ten days after her departure from Port Royal the *Mary Rose* was tumbling southward before a gentle breeze through the blue and languid seas. Much had happened in the interval. In the first place, Morgan had organized and drilled the ship's crew relentlessly. With the aid of the five principal adventurers, whom he had constituted his lieutenants, he had brought the motley crowd which he had shipped into a state of comparative efficiency and of entire subjection to his iron will. Years of quasi-respectability, of financial position, of autocratic power as Vice-Governor had modified the ideas of the old buccaneer, and the co-operative principle which had been the mainspring of action as well as tie which produced unity among the brethren-of-the-coast had ceased to be regarded, so far as he was concerned. He took care, however, to be upon fairly amicable terms with the officers in command and the veterans, though he treated the rest of the riff-raff like the dogs they were. They murmured and raged but did not revolt, although it was quite possible that if he pushed them too far, and they found a leader, they might make trouble.

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In accordance with Hornigold's advice, after deliberation between Morgan and the leaders, the *Mary Rose* had first run up to La Vaca Island, south of Hispaniola, and the number of original marauders had been increased by fifty volunteers, all those, indeed, who could be reached, from the small pirates who made that delectable spot their rendezvous. In addition to those, the crew had also been reënforced largely from those of the unpaid and discontented seamen and soldiers of the frigate who had happened to be under hatches the night of the capture. Presented with the choice of instant death or adherence to the band, most of them had accepted the latter alternative, although, to their great credit be it said, not until one or two of the loyal veterans, who had hotly refused to have anything to do with their ruffianly captors, had been forced to walk the plank as an example to the rest should they prove recalcitrant. Partly through terror, partly through discontent, partly on account of promises of the great reward awaiting them, speciously urged by Morgan himself, for he could talk as well as he could fight, and, most of all, because even at that date it was considered a meritorious act to attack a Spaniard or a Papist under any circumstances or conditions, especially by persons as ignorant as the class in question, some seventy cast in their lot with the rest.

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Among the two hundred and twenty members of the heterogeneous crew so constituted, were to be found natives of almost every race under the sun, even including one or two Spanish renegados, and it would be safe to say that the lowest and meanest representatives of the several races were assembled on that very ship. The officers and men who had been recruited from Isla La Vaca, as well as the older original members of the crew of the *Mary Rose*, together with a select few of the remainder, were men of approved courage. The officers, indeed, bore reputations for hardihood and daring not to be surpassed. Most of the rest, however, were arrant cowards. As a body the band could not compare, except in leadership, with the former bands of buccaneers who had made themselves and their names a terror to Latin civilization in the New World.

Morgan himself, however, almost made up for all deficiencies. Age had not quenched his ardor, diminished his courage, or deprived him of that magnetic quality which had made him an unquestioned leader of men. His eye was as keen, his hand as steady, his soul as reckless, and his skill as high as when he had led the greatest buccaneer fleet that had ever assembled, on the famous Panama expedition. Everybody on the ship hated him except young Teach and the faithful Black Dog; the old buccaneers because he had betrayed them, the soldiers and sailors of the crew because he had captured their ship and forced them to become his allies, the mean and lowly body of rascals because he kept them ruthlessly under hand. But they all feared him as much as they hated him and they admired him as much as they feared him.

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So far as he was concerned discipline was absolute. He still seemed to fancy himself the Vice-Governor and the representative of that King against whom he had taken up arms. He demanded to be treated accordingly. No admiral of the fleet was ever served more promptly and respectfully than he. Even his nearest associates were treated with a certain haughtiness, which they bitterly resented and which they would have called in question had the situation been other than it was. Truth to tell, influenced by Hornigold, they had embarked upon a mad enterprise, and they needed Morgan to bring it to a successful conclusion. Without him the slender coherence which already existed would fail, and anarchy would be the state upon the ship. There would be nothing left to them but to scatter if they could make an unheeded landing at some convenient place, or be captured, if they could not, with a certainty of being hung forthwith. So long as they remained together, it was certain that Morgan would lead them on some successful enterprise and they might get some reward for their risks and crimes. In his safety lay their safety.

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The buccaneer was entirely aware of this, and therefore counted freely upon the backing of the veterans among the officers and crew. He would take care of the rest.

The ship, however, was a floating colony of suspicion, treachery, and hatred. Morgan himself never appeared without being loaded with weapons, not for bravado but for use should occasion rise, and his back was always protected by the silent and gigantic maroon, whom the sailors, catching the title from those who had known him of old, referred to with malignant hatred as "Black Dog." That was a name, indeed, which the taciturn half-breed rather rejoiced in than resented. Morgan had been able to awaken love in no hearts except those of young Teach, whose feeling was admiration rather than affection, and this half-breed maroon. Whether it was from his black African mother or from his fierce red Carib father he inherited the quality of devotion was not apparent. Devoted he had been and devoted he remained.

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Close association in the narrow confines of the ship with the man who had, as he believed, wronged him, had but intensified Hornigold's hatred. The One-Eyed found it difficult to dissemble, and took refuge in a reticence which was foreign to his original frank and open character. Morgan half suspected the state of affairs in his old boatswain's moiled and evil soul, and he watched him on account of it more closely than the others, but with no great disquiet in his heart. Truth to tell, the old pirate was never so happy as in the midst of dangers, imminent and threatening, which would have broken the spirit of a less resolute man. There was one among the officers he was sure of and upon whom he could depend in an emergency, and that was young Teach. He had flattered him by unusual marks of kindness, and alone among the officers this fellow did not seem to cherish the rancor and suspicion of the others. He was too young to have experienced a betrayal as had the rest; this was his first venture in actual piracy and he found it marvelously pleasant.

The officers, too, were all suspicious of one another. As each one nursed his own private designs he suspected the others of doing likewise—and with reason. But there was as yet little outward friction among them. Raveneau, for instance, was most scrupulously polite to the captain and his associates. Velsers was too stupid in his cups—and he was generally in them—to do more than growl, and the Brazilian had all the capacities of his race for subtle concealment.

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Although the necessary orders for working the ship were obeyed and Morgan personally imposed implicit obedience and respect for his commands, no duties other than those required were performed by the men. During the day when not at work or at drill, they drank, smoked, gambled, and fought at pleasure, although, as the captain mercilessly exercised them during long hours at the great guns and with small arms, they did not have any too much leisure for play. During the night they kept watch and watch, of course, but in it all they took no care of the ship, and filth and dirt abounded. If they had anticipated a long cruise things would necessarily have been different, but as they had gone far to the southward now, and might make a landfall at any moment there was no necessity for bothering about mere cleanliness, which, as it is supposed to be next to godliness, was naturally far removed from this band of cut-throats. Morgan had not communicated his ultimate purposes to his men as yet, but as he was the only navigator on the ship he was, perforce, allowed to have his own way.

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Breakfast had been served—a meagre breakfast it was, too, for all hands were on short allowance of everything but spirits, on account of the unprovided state of the ship. Fortunately for their contentment, there was plenty of rum on board. The men were congregated forward on the fore-castle or in the waist, wrangling and arguing as usual. The officers gathered on the quarter-deck, and Morgan paced the high raised poop alone, overlooking them, when the lookout suddenly reported three sail in sight. The half-drunken sailor who had been sent aloft at daybreak had kept negligent watch, for almost as soon as he had made his report the ships were observed from the deck of the frigate.

The *Mary Rose* had the wind on her quarter, her best point of sailing, and she was covered with canvas from her trucks to her decks, from her spritsail yard to her huge mizzen crossjack, a lateen sail. The wind was light, but she was making rapid progress toward the approaching strangers, who, with their larboard tacks aboard, were beating up toward the English.

Attended by the maroon, Morgan, pistol in hand, went forward to the fore-castle, kicking his way clear through the sullen, black-browed mass of sailors. He ran a short distance up the weather fore-shrouds and took a long look at the strangers. They all flew the yellow flag of Spain. One was a huge galleon, the other two smaller ships, though larger in each instance than the *Mary Rose*, and all heavily armed.

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One of the plate ships from Porto Bello was due in this latitude about this time, and Morgan instantly surmised that the galleon was she, and that the two others were Spanish frigates to give her safe convoy across the ocean. Spain was at peace with all the world at that time, and the two frigates would have been ample to ward off the attack of any of the small piratical craft which had succeeded the buccaneer ships of the Caribbean. The Spaniards had no idea that such a vulture as Morgan was afloat; therefore, although they had sighted the *Mary Rose* long before she had seen them because they kept better watch, they came on fearlessly and without hesitation. It was evident to the experienced officers among them that the vessel was an English frigate, and as England was a country with which there was profound peace at the time they apprehended nothing.

The position of the approaching ships with reference to one another was somewhat peculiar. The first and smallest frigate was perhaps half a mile ahead of her consorts, who were sailing side by

side, a cable's length apart. Morgan at once determined to attack them. He knew that he possessed the handiest ship, and he believed that he had discovered a way to master the other three. The two frigates were the most dangerous antagonists. If he could dispose of them the galleon would be at his mercy. He did not hesitate to encounter such odds, and even in the minds of the craven part of the crew one English ship was thought to be good for any three Spaniards that ever floated.

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The interest of the crew had been excited by the approaching strangers, which were rapidly drawing nearer. They ceased their arguments and strife, therefore, and crowded forward, looking alternately from the foreign ships to their own leader, lightly poised on the sheer-poles scanning the enemy. There were plenty of men of sufficient experience among them to pronounce them Spanish ships immediately, and they therefore anticipated that work lay before them that morning. Presently Morgan sprang down upon the forecabin and faced his men.

"Lads," he said, "those are Spanish ships."

"Ay, ay, sir," came from one another as he paused a moment to let the significance of his announcement sink in.

"And," he continued, raising his voice so that it was audible throughout the ship, "the great one will be one of the plate ships homeward bound—but she'll never get there—from Porto Bello!"

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A perfect yell of delight drowned his further remarks. The men shrieked and shouted and hurraed at the joyous announcement, as if all they had to do was to go aboard and take the ships. When the hullabaloo had subsided, Morgan continued:

"I'm glad to see you take it so bravely, for while there is treasure enough under her hatches to make us all rich, yet we'll not get it without a fight, for yonder are two heavily armed frigates. We'll have to dispose of them before we get at the galleon. But, hearts of oak, I never saw the buccaneer who wasn't worth three or a dozen of the Dons, and with a stout ship like this one under my feet and a band of brave hearts like you I wouldn't hesitate to tackle the whole Spanish navy. It means a little fighting, but think of the prize!" he cried, playing skilfully upon the cupidity of his men. "Some of us will lose the number of our messes, perhaps, before nightfall; but," he continued, making a most singular and effective appeal, "there will be more to divide for each man that is left alive. Are you with me?"

"To the death!" cried young Teach, who had come forward and mingled with the crowd, lifting a naked cutlass as he spoke. His cry was taken up and repeated, first by one and then another until the whole body was yelling frantically to be given a chance to fight the Spanish ships.

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"That's well," said Morgan grimly. "Master Teach, here, will command forward on the fo'c'sl. Raveneau and Velsers shall attend to the batteries in the waist. I appoint you, Hornigold, to look after the movements of the ship. See that the best hands are at the wheel and have sail trimmers ready. My Portuguese friend, you may look to the after guns. Now to your stations. Cast loose and provide! Man the larboard battery! See every thing is ready, but hold your fire and keep silence under pain of death! Yon frigate over there, we'll strike first. She'll be unprepared and unsuspecting. One good blow ought to dispose of her."

As he spoke, the men hurried to their stations. There was no lack of skill on the frigate, and now was seen the value of Morgan's constant drilling. The cannon of the ship were cast loose and loaded, loggerheads and matches lighted, small arms distributed and primed, pikes were served out, cutlasses loosened in their sheaths, and such as had armor, still worn in greater or less degree even in that day, donned it, and the ship was full of busy preparation.

"We've no flag flying, sir," said Hornigold as the men settled down to their stations, grim and ready.

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"Ay," said Morgan, "show the English flag. We'll make as much trouble for his gracious majesty, King James, as possible."

In a short time the glorious colors of England, which had never waved over so despicable a crew before, rippled out in the freshening breeze. As they were rapidly approaching the Spanish ship now, Morgan descended from the poop-deck to make a personal inspection of his frigate before beginning action. He found everything to his taste, and passed along the lines of silent men congregated around the guns with words of stern appreciation.

The crews of the guns had been constituted with great care. The gun captains in each instance were tried and proved seamen, men as fearless as they were capable. The weaker and the more wretched portion of the band had been so placed that opportunity for showing cowardice would be greatly circumscribed, and the stern command of the captain that the officers and petty officers should instantly shoot any man who flinched from duty was not without effect. He did not hesitate to remind the men, either, that they fought with halters around their necks. As even the craven becomes dangerous when pushed to the wall, he felt they would give a good account of themselves.

"Hornigold," said Morgan, as he stepped up on the quarter-deck again, "I want the frigate to pass as close to windward of that Spanish ship as you can bring her without touching. Let her not suspect our desire, but whirl into her as we get abreast. Don't fall foul of her as you value your life!"

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"Ay, ay, sir," answered that veteran, squinting forward along the jib-boom with his one eye as if measuring the distance, "I'll bring her close enough for you to leap aboard and yet never touch a rope yarn on her."

He spoke with the consciousness and pride of his skill.

"Now, lads," cried Morgan, "have everything ready, and when I give the word pour it in on yonder ship. I want to settle her with one broadside. It'll be touch and go, for we've got to dispose of her in an instant. Stand by for the word! Now, lie down, all, behind the bulwarks and rails. Let us make no show of force as we come up. We must not arouse suspicion."

The two ships, the *Mary Rose* going free, the Spanish frigate close hauled on the port tack, were now within hailing distance. As they approached each other the buccaneer could see that the other ship was crowded with men. Among her people the flash of sunlight upon iron helms denoted that she carried a company of soldiers. The Spaniards were entirely unsuspecting. The men had not gone to their quarters, the guns were still secured; in short, save for the military trappings of the soldiers on board and the topped muzzles of her cannon, she was in appearance as peaceful a vessel as sailed the seas.

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The two ships were near enough now to make conversation possible, and the *Mary Rose* was hailed by a tall, richly dressed officer in glistening breastplate and polished steel cap, standing on the forecastle of the other ship.

"What ship is that?" he cried in broken English.

"This is the frigate *Mary Rose*." The usual answer to such a hail would have been: "This is His Britannic Majesty's frigate *Mary Rose*," but the Spaniards suspected nothing as Morgan continued, "carrying Sir Henry Morgan, sometime Vice-Governor of the Island of Jamaica."

"I have the honor to wish the Vice-Governor a very good morning," answered the Spaniard, courteously waving his hand in salutation.

"Now, Hornigold, now!" said Morgan in a fierce whisper.

The old boatswain sprang himself to the wheel. With his powerful hands he revolved it quickly until it was hard up. The frigate answered it instantly. She swung away toward the Spaniard to leeward of her with a suddenness that surprised even her steersman.

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"And I salute the Vice-Governor," continued the Spanish captain, just as the English ship swept down upon him; and then he cried in sudden alarm and excitement:

"Have a care, señor! What mean you? You will be aboard of us! Hard up with the helm!"

As soon as the *Mary Rose* had begun to fall off, ay, even before her motion had been perceptible, Hornigold had reversed the helm.

"Flow the head sheets there," he cried, shoving the wheel over spoke by spoke with all the force of his arms. "Flatten in aft a little, here! Steady! Very well dyce. We're right abreast now, Captain," he said.

Almost as quickly as she had fallen off the nimble frigate, beautifully handled, came to the wind again. She was now almost in touch with the other ship. Hornigold's seamanship and skill had been magnificent. He had done all that was asked of him and all that he had promised.

"Ay, ay," answered Morgan in triumphant commendation. "Handsomely done. I could leap aboard!"

The Spanish ship was filled with confusion. The captain, with his face black with rage, stood on the forecastle shaking his fist.

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"This is outrageous, sir!" he shouted. "You have nearly run us down! What do you want?"

"I want to return your salute," answered Morgan suavely. "Up, lads!" he cried. As the men sprang to their feet, he roared out fiercely: "Stand by! Fire! Pour it into them!"

The *Mary Rose* was almost in contact with the Spanish ship, when a perfect tornado of fire burst from her side. Every gun in her broadside, and she was a forty-eight gun frigate, was discharged point-blank at the astonished enemy. Not waiting to reload the guns, the crew seized the small arms ready charged to hand, and as they slowly swept by poured a withering fire upon the Spaniard's crowded decks. Out of the flame and smoke the *Mary Rose* burst upon the astounded eyes of the officers and men of the two remaining ships. The first frigate was a wreck on the water. Some of the pirate guns had been depressed, great holes had been opened by the shot, the masts had been carried away, and the devoted ship was sinking, her decks covered with dead and dying.

"We wish you the compliments of the morning, señor," roared Morgan, facing aft toward the battered and ruined frigate. "How like you our salute?"

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But the captain of the Spanish vessel lay dead upon his bloody deck, and if any answered the jeering taunt it was drowned by the laughter and cheering of the English crew. They had eliminated the first ship from the game. They had diminished their enemies by a third, and full of confidence they swept down upon the other two.

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CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH IS RELATED THE STRANGE EXPEDIENT OF THE CAPTAIN AND HOW THEY TOOK THE GREAT GALLEON

Although they could not comprehend the reason for the vicious attack upon their consort by a ship of a supposedly friendly power, it was evident to the Spaniards in the two remaining ships that the English frigate was approaching them with the most sinister and malevolent purpose. One glance at the sinking remains of their ruined and battered consort established that fact in the most obtuse mind. Consequently the exultant men on the *Mary Rose* could hear the shrill notes of the trumpeters on the two other ships calling their men to arms.



With a confidence born of success, however, Morgan resolutely bore down upon the enemy. Even the dastards in his crew had been excited by the ease and success of the first treacherous blow and plucked up courage, believing that their captain's invincible skill, address, and seamanship would carry them safely through the next encounter.

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The Spanish had little warning after all, for the breeze was rapidly freshening, and in what seemed an incredibly short time the English frigate was close at hand. Though they worked with a desperate energy they had not entirely completed those preparations required by the shock of battle. As usual, Morgan was determined to lose no time. If he could have thrown his vessel upon them out of the fire and smoke of the first broadside he would have gained the victory with scarcely less difficulty than he had seized the first advantage, but that was not to be, and it was with considerable anxiety that he surveyed the crowded decks of the two remaining ships.

He had no fear of the armament of either one, but if those Spanish soldiers ever got a footing upon his own deck it was probable they could not be dislodged without a tremendous sacrifice of life; and as he gazed over his motley crew he even questioned their ability to contend successfully with such a mass of veterans. He had hoped that the remaining frigate would detach herself from the galleon, in which event the superior handiness and mobility of his own ship, to say nothing of his probable advantage in the way in which his batteries would be fought, would enable him to dispose of her without too much difficulty. Then he could with ease place the huge and unwieldy galleon at his mercy. But the two Spanish ships stuck close together, too close indeed, Morgan thought, for their own safety. They were both on the wind with their larboard tacks aboard, the frigate slightly ahead of and to windward of the galleon, on the side, that is, whence the *Mary Rose* was approaching. So far as he could divine it, the Spanish plan, if they had formulated any in their hurry, appeared to be for the frigate to engage the *Mary Rose*, and while she had the latter ship under her battery, the galleon would tack across the English vessel's bows, or stern as might be, rake her, get her between the two ships, run her aboard, and thus effect her ruin. The plan was simple, practicable, and promised easy success, provided the Englishman did what was expected of him.

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Morgan was not to be caught napping that way. As he rushed down upon them there came into his head one of the most daring ideas that has ever flashed across a seaman's brain. Hastily summoning Braziliano he bade him take a dozen of his men, descend to the after magazine, procure two or three barrels of powder from the gunner, and stow them in the cabin under the poop-deck. He charged him to do it as quietly as possible and take only men for the purpose upon whom he could depend. While this was being done young Teach was also summoned from the fore-castle, his place being taken by old Velsers, whose division in the battery was placed under the command of Raveneau. There was a whispered colloquy between the chieftain and his young subordinate, after which the latter nodded his head, ran below, and concealed himself in one of the staterooms under the quarter-deck. In a little space the Portuguese reappeared with his men and announced that they had completed their task; whereupon they were directed to return to their stations.

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Meanwhile the crew had been recharging the battery and reloading the small arms. Morgan addressed to them a few words of hearty approval of their previous actions and predicted an easy victory over the two ships. The Spanish captain naturally supposed—and indeed the courses upon which the three ships were sailing if persisted in would have brought about the result—that the *Mary Rose* would pass along his larboard side, and the two vessels would engage in the formal manner of the period, yard-arm to yard-arm, until the galleon could get into action and so settle it in the purposed way. He intended, of course, if it could be brought about, to throw the masses of soldiers he was transporting home upon the English decks, and carry the frigate by boarding.

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Again Morgan put Hornigold in charge of the manœuvring of the ship, and again that old worthy chose to handle the spokes himself. There was a brief conversation between them, and then the English captain ran forward on the fore-castle. The ships were very near now. In a moment or two they would pass each other in parallel courses, though in opposite direction, and their broadsides would bear; but when the *Mary Rose* was about a cable's length from the Spanish frigate

something happened.

The astonished Don heard a sharp command ring out from the approaching English ship, after which she made a wide sweep and came driving straight at him at a furious speed. The English captain intended to run him down! Here was to be no passage along his broadside. The other was upon him! The cutwater of the onrushing ship loomed up before him tremendously. Instantly all was confusion on the Spanish ship! The steersman lost his head, and without orders put his helm up sharply; some one cut the sheet of the after-sail on the huge lateen yard, and the frigate went whirling around on her heel like a top, in a violent and fatal, as well as vain, effort to get out of the road.

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It was a most foolish manœuvre, for close at hand on the lee side of her the galleon came lumbering along. Her captain, too, had seen the peril, and had elected to meet it by tacking under his consort's stern. But he was too near, and the other ship fell off and was swept to leeward too rapidly. His own ship, cumbersome and unwieldy, as they always were, was slow in answering the helm. The frigate and galleon came together with a terrific crash. The shock carried away the foretopmast of the frigate, which fell across the head yards of the galleon. The two ships were instantly locked together. They swung drifting and helpless in the tossing waters.

Morgan had counted upon this very catastrophe. A twist of the helm, a touch of the braces, and the prow of the *Mary Rose* swung to windward. As her batteries bore she hurled their messengers of death into the crowded masses on the Spanish ships. Although dismayed by the collision, the gunners on the frigate made a spirited reply with a discharge which at such close range did much execution.

Unfortunately for her, the *Mary Rose* had rushed so close to the two entangled ships that it was impossible for her to escape hitting them. The English captain would have given anything if he could have gone free of the mass, for he could have passed under the stern of the two helpless ships, raked them, and probably would have had them at his mercy; but his dash at them had been an earnest one, and in order to carry out his plan successfully he had been forced to throw his ship right upon them. Therefore, though the helm was shifted and the braces hauled in an effort to get clear, and though the ship under Morgan's conning and Hornigold's steering was handled as few ships have ever been handled, and though it was one of the speediest and most weatherly of vessels, they could not entirely swing her clear. The stern of the frigate crashed against the stern of the nearest Spanish ship drifting frantically to leeward.

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The Spanish captain, mortified and humiliated beyond expression by the mishap, instantly realized that this contact presented them with a possibility of retrieving themselves. Before the ships could be separated, grappling irons were thrown, and in a second the three were locked in a close embrace. Morgan had anticipated this situation also, although he had hoped to avoid it, and had prepared for it. As the two ships became fast the high poop and rail of the Spaniard were black with iron-capped men. They swarmed over on the lower poop and quarter-deck of the *Mary Rose* in a dense mass. Fortunately, the small arms on both sides had been discharged a moment before and there had been no time to reload. The remainder of the engagement to all intents and purposes would be fought with the cold steel.

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Morgan had gained an advantage in throwing the two ships into collision, but he appeared to have lost it again because he had been unable to clear the wrecks himself. The advantage was now with the Spaniards, whose force outnumbered his own two or three to one. Surprising as it was to the old buccaneers and the bolder spirits among his crew, whose blood was up sufficiently to enable them to long for the onset, Morgan had run to the waist of the ship when he saw the inevitable collision and had called all hands from the poop and quarter. The *Mary Rose* was provided with an elevated quarter-deck and above that a high poop. Massing his men in the gangways just forward of the mainmast and on the forecastle itself, with the hardiest spirits in the front line and Morgan himself in advance of all sword in hand, the two parties contemplated each other for a little space before joining in the onset.

The poop and quarter-deck were crowded so thick with Spanish soldiers and sailors that room could scarcely be found for the increasing procession, for, anxious to be in at the death, the men of the galleon clinging to the frigate ran across and joined their comrades. Here were trained and veteran soldiers in overwhelming numbers, with the advantage of position in that they fought from above down, to oppose which Morgan had his motley crew behind him.

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"Yield, you dastardly villain!" shouted the captain of the Spanish frigate, who was in the fore of his men.

"Shall I have good quarter?" cried Morgan.

A low growl ran through the ranks of the buccaneers at this question. Yet the rascals among the crew back of him instantly took up the cry.

"Quarter! Quarter! We surrender! We strike! For heaven's sake——"

"Silence!" roared Morgan—an order which was enforced by the officers and veterans by fierce blows with pistol butts, hilts of swords, and even naked fists. "I would hear the answer of the Spanish captain."

"We give no quarter to pirates and murderers," the other shouted.

"That's what I thought," said Morgan triumphantly, and as he spoke he drew from his pocket a

silver whistle like a boatswain's call. He blew it shrilly before the wondering men.

At that instant Teach, followed by the few men who had remained below in the powder division, came running up to Morgan from the hatchway between the two forces. [Pg 123]

"Is't done?" cried the captain.

"Ay, sir. In another——"

"Forward, gentlemen!" shouted the Spanish captain, dropping from the quarter-deck to the main-deck. "God and St. Jago! Have at them!"

Before he had taken two steps the terrific roar of a deafening explosion came to the startled buccaneers out of the blast of flame and smoke, in the midst of which could be heard shrieks and groans of the most terrible anguish. Teach had connected the powder with the fuse, and when he had heard the sound of Morgan's whistle, the agreed signal, he had ignited it and blown up the stern of the frigate.

The Spaniards were hurled in every direction. So powerful was the concussion that the front ranks of the buccaneers were also thrown down by it. Morgan happened to fall by the side of the Spanish captain, and the latter, though badly wounded, with determined and heroic valor raised himself on his arm and strove to kill the buccaneer. But the faithful Carib, who had reserved one charged pistol by his master's command for such an emergency, shot him dead.

Morgan struggled to his feet and looked at the scene. Some of his men did not rise with the others, for they had been killed by the falling splinters and bits of iron. The whole stern of the *Mary Rose* was gone. There wasn't a Spaniard left before them. A few figures shrieking vainly for help, clutching at floating pieces of timber, might be seen struggling in the sea. The Spanish frigate had a great hole in the port side of her after-works. She was on fire. The three ships were rocking as if in a hurricane. [Pg 124]

Panic filled the minds of the greater part of the buccaneers at this tremendous catastrophe. Had Morgan to save himself ruined his own ship? They were appalled by the terrific expedient of their captain. Wild cries and imprecations burst forth.

"The ship is sinking!"

"We are lost!"

"Silence!" shouted Morgan, again and again. "The ship is sinking, but our ship is there. Let those who love life follow me."

He sprang at the burning rail of the Spanish frigate. Black Dog was at his heels, Ben Hornigold followed hard upon, Teach was on the other side. From the waist Raveneau and the Brazilian strove to inspire the men. Old Velsers from the fore-castle drove them forward as quickly as he could. Presently they recovered their courage in some measure, for the fighting force of the enemy had disappeared. They had lost a ship, but there were two other ships before them. They swarmed over the rail with cheers and cries. There was little or no resistance. The men of the frigate were stunned into helplessness by the explosion, although the captain of the galleon rallied a few men and fought until they were all cut down, and the two ships were taken by storm. [Pg 125]

They had scarcely gained the deck of the galleon before the remains of the *Mary Rose* sank beneath the sea, the wounded upon the decks vainly crying for succor.

By this time the weather side of the remaining Spanish ship was a mass of flame and there was imminent danger that the fire would be communicated to the galleon. Giving his men time for nothing, Morgan set to work furiously to extricate himself. Axes and hatchets were plied and all the skill and seamanship of the conquerors brought into play. Finally they succeeded in getting clear and working away from the burning frigate. Morgan at once put the galleon before the wind, and when he had drawn away a short distance, hove to the ship to take account of the damage before determining his future course.

Far back on the ocean and low in the water drifted the sinking remains of the first Spanish frigate. Near at hand was the hulk of the second ship, now a blazing furnace. The first was filled with living men, many of them desperately wounded. No attention was paid to them by the buccaneers. They cried for mercy unheeded. Anyway their suspense would soon be over. Indeed, the first ship sank and the second blew up with a fearful explosion a short time after they got away. A brief inspection showed that the galleon had suffered little or no damage that could not be repaired easily at sea. Taking account of his men, Morgan found that about twenty were missing. Taking no care for them nor for the two ships he had fought so splendidly, pirate though he was, he clapped sail on the galleon and bore away to the southward. [Pg 126]

CHAPTER VII

WHEREIN BARTHOLOMEW SAWKINS MUTINIED AGAINST HIS CAPTAIN AND WHAT BEFEL HIM ON THAT ACCOUNT

he *Almirante Recalde*, for such was the name of the galleon, was easily and speedily repaired by [Pg 127]



the skilled seamen of the *Mary Rose* under such leadership and direction as the experience of Morgan and the officers afforded. By the beginning of the first dog-watch even a critical inspection would scarcely have shown that she had been in action. With the wise forethought of a seaman, Morgan had subordinated every other duty to the task of making the vessel fit for any danger of the sea, and he had deferred any careful examination of her cargo until everything had been put shipshape again; although by his hurried questioning of the surviving officers he had learned that the *Almirante Recalde* was indeed loaded with treasure of Peru, which had been received by her *via* the Isthmus of Panama for transportation to Spain. On board her were several priests returning to Spain headed by one Fra Antonio de Las Casas, together with a band of nuns under the direction of an aged abbess, Sister Maria Christina.

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In the indiscriminate fury of the assault one or two of the priests had been killed, but so soon as the ship had been fully taken possession of the lives of the surviving clerics and the lives of the good sisters had been spared by Morgan's express command. These unfortunate women had been forced into the great cabin, where they were guarded by men in whom confidence could be placed. The priests were allowed to minister to their dying compatriots so long as they kept out of the way of the sailors. No

feeling of pity or compassion induced Morgan to withhold the women from his crew. He was a man of prudent foresight and he preserved them for a purpose, a purpose in which the priests were included.

In the hold of the ship nearly one hundred and fifty wretched prisoners were discovered. They were the crew of the buccaneer ship *Daring*, which had been commanded by a famous adventurer named Ringrose, who had been captured by a Spanish squadron after a desperate defense off the port of Callao, Peru. They were being transported to Spain, where they had expected summary punishment for their iniquities. No attention whatever had been paid to their protests that they were Englishmen, and indeed the statement was hardly true for at least half of them belonged to other nations. In the long passage from Callao to the Isthmus and thence through the Caribbean they had been kept rigorously under hatches. Close confinement for many days and enforced subsistence upon a scanty and inadequate diet had caused many to die and impaired the health of the survivors. When the hatch covers were opened, the chains unshackled and the miserable wretches brought on deck, their condition moved even some of the buccaneers to pity. The galleon was generously provided for her long cruise across the ocean, and the released prisoners, by Morgan's orders, were liberally treated. No work was required of them; they were allowed to wander about the decks at pleasure, refreshed by the open air, the first good meal they had enjoyed in several months, and by a generous allowance of spirits. As soon as they learned the object of the cruise, without exception they indicated their desire to place themselves under the command of Morgan. Ringrose, their captain, had been killed, and they were without a leader, which was fortunate in that it avoided the complications of divided command. Fortunate, that is, for Ringrose, for Morgan would have brooked no rival on such an expedition.

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As soon as it could be done, a more careful inspection and calculation satisfied the buccaneer of the immense value of his prize. The lading of the galleon, consisting principally of silver bullion, was probably worth not far from a million Spanish dollars—pieces of eight! This divided among the one hundred and eighty survivors of the original crew meant affluence for even the meanest cabin boy. It was wealth such as they had not even dreamed of. It was a prize the value of which had scarcely ever been paralleled.

They were assembled forward of the quarter-deck when the announcement was made. When they understood the news the men became drunk with joy. It would seem as if they had been suddenly stricken mad. Some of them stared in paralyzed silence, others broke into frantic cheers and yells, some reeled and shuddered like drunken men. The one person who preserved his imperturbable calmness was Morgan himself. The gratitude of these men toward him was overwhelming. Even those who had good cause to hate him forgot for the time being their animosity—all except Hornigold, whose hatred was beyond all price. Under his leadership they had achieved such a triumph as had scarcely ever befallen them in the palmiest days of their career, and with little or no loss they had been put in possession of a prodigious treasure. They crowded about him presently with enthusiastic cheers of affection and extravagant vows of loving service. All, that is, except Hornigold, whose sense of injury, whose thirst for vengeance, was so deep that all the treasure of Potosi itself would not have abated one jot or one tittle of it.

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The general joy, however, was not shared by the rescued buccaneers. Although they had but a few hours before despaired of life in the loathsome depths of the vile hold, and they had been properly grateful for the sudden and unexpected release which had given them their liberty and saved them from the gibbet, yet it was not in any human man, especially a buccaneer, to view with equanimity the distribution—or the proposed distribution—of so vast a treasure and feel that he could not share in it. The fresh air and the food and drink had already done much for those hardy ruffians. They were beginning to regain, if not all their strength, at least some of their courage and assurance. They congregated in little groups here and there among Morgan's

original men and stared with lowering brows and flushed faces at the frantic revel in which they could not participate. Not even the cask of rum which Morgan ordered broached to celebrate the capture, and of which all hands partook with indiscriminate voracity, could bring joy to their hearts. After matters had quieted down somewhat—and during this time the galleon had been mainly left to navigate herself—Morgan deemed it a suitable occasion to announce his ultimate designs to the men.

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"Gentlemen, shipmates, and bold hearts all," he cried, waving his hand for silence, "we have captured the richest prize probably that floats on the ocean. There are pieces of eight and silver bullion enough beneath the hatches, as I have told you, to make us rich for life, to say nothing of the gold, jewels, spices, and whatnot, besides——"

He was interrupted by another yell of appreciation.

"But, men," he continued, "I hardly know what to do with it."

"Give it to us," roared a voice, which was greeted with uproarious laughter, "we'll make away with it."

Morgan marked down with his eye the man who had spoken and went on.

"The ports of His Majesty, the King of England, will be closed to us so soon as our capture of the *Mary Rose* is noted. England is at peace with the world. There is not a French or Spanish port that would give us a haven. If we appeared anywhere in European waters with this galleon we would be taken and hanged. Now, what's to be done?"

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"Run the ship ashore on the New England coast," cried the man who had spoken before. "Divide the treasure. Burn the ship and scatter. Let every man look to his own share and his own neck."

"A plan, a plan!"

"Ay, that'll be the way of it!"

"Sawkins is right!"

"To the New England shore! Ben Hornigold will pilot the ship!" burst in confused clamor from the crew to whom the plan appealed.

"By heaven, no!" shouted Morgan. "That's well enough for you, not for me. I'm a marked man. You can disappear. I should be taken, and Hornigold and Raveneau and the rest. It won't do. We must stay by the ship."

"And what then?"

"Keep to the original plan. We'll sail this ship down to the Spanish Main and capture a town, divide our treasure, make our way overland to the Pacific, where we'll find another ship, and then away to the South Seas! Great as is our booty, there is still more to be had there for the taking. We'll be free to go where we please with the whole South American coast at hand. There are islands, tropic islands, there, where it's always summer. They are ours for the choosing. We can establish ourselves there. We'll found a community, with every man a law for himself. We'll——"

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But the recital of this Utopian dream was rudely interrupted.

"Nay, Master," cried Sawkins, who had done most of the talking from among the crew, "we go no farther."

He was confident that he had the backing of the men, and in that confidence grew bold with reckless temerity. Flushed by the victory of the morning, the rum he had imbibed, intoxicated by the thought of the treasure which was to be shared, the man went on impudently:

"No, Sir Harry Morgan, we've decided to follow our latest plan. We'll work this ship up to the New England coast and wreck her there. There are plenty of spots where she can be cast away safely and none to know it. We'll obey you there and no further. We've got enough treasure under hatches to satisfy any reasonable man. We're not afeared o' the King if you are."

"You fool!" thundered Morgan. "You will be hanged as soon as your part in the adventure is known."

"And who is to make it known, pray? As you said, we are poor ignorant men. It's nothing to us if you are marked, and you, and you," he continued, stepping forward and pointing successively at Morgan and the little band of officers who surrounded him. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, we'd have you understand, and we're content with what we've got. We don't take no stock in them islands of yours. We can get all the women we want, and of our own kind without crossing the Isthmus. We don't want no further cruisin'. There's no need for us to land on the Spanish Main. We've made up our minds to 'bout ship and bear away to the northward. Am I right, mates?"

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"Ay, ay, right you are!" roared the men surging aft.

"You mutinous hound!" yelled Morgan, leaning forward in a perfect fury of rage, and his passion was something appalling to look upon.

Hornigold clutched at the helm, which had been deserted by the seamen detailed to it during the

course of the hot debate. The old man cast one long, anxious glance to windward where a black squall was apparently brewing. But he said nothing. The argument was between Morgan and his crew, there was no need for him to interfere. Teach, Raveneau, Velsers, and the officers drew their pistols and bared their swords, but most of the crew were also armed, and if it came to a trial of strength the cabin gang was so overwhelmingly outnumbered that it would have been futile to inaugurate a contest.

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Morgan, however, was frantic with rage. To be braved by a member of his crew, to have his plans balked by any man, and to be openly insulted in this manner! He did not hesitate a second. He rushed at Master Bartholomew Sawkins, and, brave man as that sailor was, he fairly quailed before the terrific incarnation of passionate fury his captain presented. The rest of the crew gave back before the furious onset of Sir Henry.

"You dog!" he screamed, and before the other realized his intention he struck him a fearful blow in the face with his naked fist. Always a man of unusual strength, his rage had bestowed upon him a Herculean force. He seized the dazed man by the throat and waist belt ere he fell to the deck from the force of the blow, and lifting him up literally pitched him overboard. Before the crew had recovered from their astonishment and terror at this bold action, the buccaneer officers closed behind their captain, each covering the front ranks of the men with a pistol. At the same instant the other men, Ringrose's crew, came shoving through the crowd, snatching such arms as they could in the passage, although most of them had to be satisfied with belaying pins.

"We're with you, Captain Morgan," cried one of their number. "We've had no treasure, and it seems we're not to have a share in this either. We've been in the South Seas," continued the speaker, a man named L'Ollonois, noted for his cruelty, rapacity, and success, "and the captain speaks truly. There are all that can delight brave men and a race of cowards to defend them. What's this treasure? It is great, but there are other things we want—wine and women!"

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The man who had been thrown overboard had shrieked for help as he fell. The splash he had made as he struck the water had been followed by another. A Spanish priest standing by the rail had seized a grating and thrown it to the man. Morgan took in the situation in a glance.

"Who threw that grating?" he cried.

"I, señor," composedly answered the priest, who understood English.

Morgan instantly snatched a pistol from de Lussan's hand and shot the man dead.

"I allow no one," he shouted, "to interfere between me and the discipline of my men! You speak well, L'Ollonois. And for you, hounds!" he roared, clubbing the smoking pistol and stepping toward the huddled, frightened men, "get back to your duties unless you wish instant death! Scuttle me, if I don't blow up the galleon unless you immediately obey! Bear a hand there! If you hesitate—Fire on them!" he cried to his officers, but the men in the front did not linger. They broke away from his presence so vehemently that they fell over one another in the gangways.

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Morgan instantly snatched a pistol from

de Lussan's hand and shot the man dead.

"Don't fire!" they cried in terror. "We'll go back to duty."

Morgan was completely master of the situation.

"I am to be obeyed," he cried, "implicitly, without question, without hesitation!"

"Ay, ay!"

"We will, we will!"

"That's well. Heave that carrion overboard," kicking the body of the priest. "Now we'll go back and pick up Sawkins," he continued. "Ready about, station for stays!"

"Look you, Captain Morgan," cried Hornigold, pointing to leeward. "The squall! 'Twill be soon on us. We'd best reduce sail and run for it."

"Nay," said Morgan, "I'll allow not even a storm to interfere with my plans. Flow the head sheets there! Hard down with the helm! Aft, here some of you, and man the quarter boat. I said I'd pick him up, and picked up he shall be, in spite of hell!"

The ship, like all Spanish ships, was unhandy and a poor sailor. Morgan, however, got all out of her that mortal man could get. With nice seamanship he threw her up into the wind, hove her to, and dropped a boat overboard. Teach had volunteered for the perilous command of her and the best men on the ship were at the oars. Sawkins had managed to catch the grating and was clinging feebly when the boat swept down upon him. They dragged him aboard and then turned to the ship. The sinister squall was rushing down upon them from the black horizon with terrific velocity. The men bent their backs and strained at the oars as never before. It did not seem possible that they could beat the wind. The men on the ship beseeched Morgan to fill away and abandon their comrades.

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"No!" he cried. "I sent them there and I'll wait for them if I sink the ship!"

Urged by young Teach to exertion superhuman, the boat actually shot under the quarter of the galleon before the squall broke. The tackles were hooked on and she was run up to the davits with all her crew aboard.

"Up with the helm!" cried Morgan the instant the boat was alongside. "Swing the mainyard and get the canvas off her. Aloft, topmen, settle away the halliards! Clew down! Lively, now!"

And as the ship slowly paid off and gathered away the white squall broke upon them. The sea was a-smother with mist and rain. The wind whipped through the shrouds and rigging, but everything held. Taking a great bone in her teeth the old *Almirante Recalde* heeled far over to leeward and ripped through the water to the southward at such a pace as she had never made before. On the quarter-deck a drenched, shivering, and sobbing figure knelt at Morgan's feet and kissed his hand.

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"Wilt obey me in the future?" cried the captain to the repentant man.

"Fore God, I will, sir," answered Sawkins.

"That's well," said the old buccaneer. "Take him forward, men, and let him have all the rum he wants to take off the chill of his wetting."

"You stood by me that time, Sir Henry," cried young Teach, who had been told of Morgan's refusal to fill away, "and, by heaven, I'll stand by you in your need!"

"Good. I'll remember that," answered Morgan, glad to have made at least one friend among all he commanded.

"What's our course now, captain?" asked Hornigold as soon as the incident was over.

"Sou'west by west-half-west," answered Morgan, who had taken an observation that noon, glancing in the binnacle as he spoke.

"And that will fetch us where?" asked the old man, who was charged with the duty of the practical sailing of the ship.

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"To La Guayra and Venezuela."

"Oho!" said the old boatswain, "St. Jago de Leon, Caracas, t'other side of the mountains will be our prize?"

"Ay," answered Morgan. "'Tis a rich place and has been unpillaged for a hundred years."

He turned on his heel and walked away. He vouchsafed no further information and there was no way for Master Ben Hornigold to learn that the object that drew Morgan to La Guayra and St. Jago was not plunder but the Pearl of Caracas.

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wo days later they made a landfall off the terrific coast of Caracas, where the tree-clad mountains soar into the clouds abruptly from the level of the sea, where the surf beats without intermission even in the most peaceful weather upon the narrow strip of white sand which separates the blue waters of the Caribbean from the massive cliffs that tower above them.

In the intervening time the South Sea buccaneers had picked up wonderfully. These men, allured by the hope of further plunder under a captain who had been so signally successful in the past and in the present, constituted a most formidable auxiliary to Morgan's original crew. Indeed, with the exception of the old hands they were the best of the lot. L'Ollonois had been admitted among the officers on a suitable footing, and there was little or no friction among the crews. They were getting hammered into shape, too, under Morgan's hard drilling, and it was a vastly more dangerous body of men than the drunken gang who had sailed away from Jamaica. Though not the equal of the former buccaneering bands who had performed in their nefarious careers unheard of prodigies of valor and courage, they were still not to be despised. Had it been known on the Spanish Main that such a body was afloat there would have been a thrill of terror throughout the South American continent, for there were many who could remember with the vividness of eye-witnesses and participants the career of crime and horror which the old buccaneers had inaugurated.

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Like a politic captain, Morgan had done his best to get the men whom he had subdued by his intrepid courage and consummate address into good humor. Rum and spirits were served liberally, work was light, in fact none except the necessary seaman's duties were required of the men, although an hour or two every day was employed in hard drill with swords, small arms, and great guns. In martial exercises the veterans were perfect, and they assiduously endeavored to impart their knowledge to the rest.

It was Morgan's plan to run boldly into La Guayra under the Spanish flag. No one could possibly take the *Almirante Recalde* for anything but a Spanish ship. There was no reason for suspecting the presence of an enemy, for Spain had none in these seas. If there were other ships in the roadstead, for the harbor of La Guayra was really nothing more than an open road, the buccaneer could easily dispose of them in their unprepared condition. Indeed, Morgan rather hoped that there might be others, for, after he captured them, he would have a greater force of guns to train upon the forts of the town, which he expected to take without much difficulty, and then be governed in his manœuvres toward Caracas by circumstances as they arose.

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Two days after the capture of the galleon, then, with the wind fresh from the northeast, on a gray, threatening, stormy morning, she was running to the westward along the shore. A few hours at their present speed would bring them opposite La Guayra, whose location at the foot of the mighty La Silla of Caracas was even then discernible. Morgan could see that there were two or three other vessels opposite the town straining at their anchors in the heavy sea. Every preparation for action had been made in good time and the guns had been loaded. The sea lashings had been cast off, although the gun-tackles were carefully secured, for the wind was blowing fresher and the sea running heavier every hour.

The men were armed to the teeth. There happened to be a goodly supply of arms on the Spanish ship in addition to those the buccaneers had brought with them, which were all distributed. Many a steel cap destined for some proud Spanish hidalgo's head now covered the cranium of some rude ruffian whom the former would have despised as beneath his feet.

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Everything was propitious for their enterprise but the weather. The veterans who were familiar with local conditions in the Caribbean studied the northeastern skies with gloomy dissatisfaction. The wind was blowing dead inshore, and as the struck bells denoted the passing hours, with each half-hourly period it grew appreciably stronger. If it continued to blow, or if, as it was almost certain, the strength of the wind increased, it would be impossible without jeopardizing the ship to come to anchor in the exposed roadstead. They would have to run for it. Nay, more, they would have to beat out to sea against it, for the coast-line beyond La Guayra turned rapidly to the northward.

Morgan was a bold and skilful mariner, and he held his course parallel to the land much longer than was prudent. He was loath, indeed, to abandon even temporarily a design upon which he had determined, and as he had rapidly run down his southing in this brief cruise his determination had been quickened by the thought of his growing nearness to the Pearl of Caracas, until for the moment love—or what he called love—had almost made him forget the treasure in the ship beneath his feet. For the Pearl of Caracas was a woman.

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Mercedes de Lara, daughter of the Viceroy of Venezuela, on her way home from Spain where she had been at school, to join her father, the Count Alvaro de Lara in the Vice-regal Palace at St. Jago de Leon, sometimes called the City of Caracas, in the fair valley on the farther side of those towering tree-clad mountains—the Cordilleras of the shore—had touched at Jamaica. There she had been received with due honor, as became the daughter of so prominent a personage, by the Vice-Governor and his wretched wife. Morgan's heart had been inflamed by the dark, passionate beauty of the Spanish maiden. It was only by a severe restraint enjoined upon himself by his position that he had refrained from abusing the hospitality he extended, by seizing her in the old buccaneer fashion. The impression she had made upon him had been lasting, and when he found

himself alone, an outlaw, all his dreams of the future centered about his woman.

He would carry out the plans which he had outlined to his men, but the Pearl of Caracas, for so Donna Mercedes was called, must accompany him to the South Seas to be the Island Queen of that Buccaneer Empire of which he was to be the founder. That Donna Mercedes might object to this proposition; that she might love another man, might even be married by this time, counted for nothing in Morgan's plans. He had taken what he wanted by dint of his iron will and the strength of his right arm in the past and he should continue the process in the future. If the hand of man could not turn him, certainly the appeal of woman would avail nothing.

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Consequently he was most reluctant that morning, for his passion had increased with each o'er-run league of sea, to bear away from La Guayra, which was the port of entry for Caracas; but even his ardent spirit was at last convinced of the necessity. It was blowing a gale now and they were so near the shore, although some distance to the eastward of the town, that they could see the surf breaking with tremendous force upon the strip of sand. The officers and older men had observed the course of the ship with growing concern, but no one had ventured to remonstrate with Morgan until old Ben Hornigold as a privileged character finally summoned his courage and approached him.

"Mark yon shore, Captain Morgan," he said, and when he made up his mind he spoke boldly. "The wind freshens. We're frightfully near. Should it come on to blow we could not save the ship. You know how unseamanly these Spanish hulks are."

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"Right you are, Hornigold," answered Morgan, yet frowning heavily. "Curse this wind! We must claw off, I suppose."

"Ay, and at once," cried Hornigold. "See, the wind shifts already! It blows straight from the north now."

"Hands by the braces there!" shouted Morgan, following with apprehension the outstretched finger of the old boatswain. "Ease down the helm. Brace up. Lively, lads!"

In a few moments the great ship, her yards braced sharply up, was headed out to seaward on the starboard tack. The wind was now blowing a whole gale and the masts of the ship were bending like whips.

"We'll have to get sail off her, I'm thinking, Hornigold," said Morgan.

"Ay, ay, sir, and quick!"

"Aloft!" yelled Morgan, "and take in the to'gallant s'l's. Close reef the tops'l's and double reef the courses then."

The shaking shrouds were soon covered with masses of men, and as the ship was exceedingly well handled the canvas was promptly snugged down by the eager crew. Hornigold with young Teach to assist him went to the helm. Morgan gave his personal attention to the manoeuvring of the ship, and the other officers stationed themselves where they could best promote and direct the efforts of the seamen.

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Thus during the long morning they endeavored to claw off the lee shore. Morgan luffed the ship through the heavy squalls which rose to the violence of a hurricane, with consummate skill. Absolutely fearless, a master of his profession, he did all with that ship that mortal man could have done, yet their situation became more and more precarious. They had long since passed La Guayra. They had had a fleeting glimpse of the shipping in the harbor driving helplessly on shore as they dashed by under the gray clouds which had overspread the sea. That town was now hidden from them by a bend of the coast, and they found themselves in a curious bight of land, extending far into the ocean in front of them. The mountains here did not so nearly approach the water-line, and from the look of the place there appeared to be a shoal projecting some distance into the ocean from the point ahead. Some of the buccaneers who knew these waters confirmed the indications by asserting the existence of the shoal.

In spite of all that Morgan could do it was quite evident that they could not weather the shoal on their present tack. There was not sea-room to wear and bear up on the other tack. The vessel, in fact, like all ships in those days and especially Spanish galleons, had a tendency to go to leeward like a barrel, and only Morgan's resourceful seamanship had saved them from the fatal embraces of the shore long since. The canvas she was carrying was more than she could legitimately bear in such a hurricane. If there had been sea-room Morgan would have stripped her to bare poles long since, but under the circumstances it was necessary for him to retain full control and direction of the ship; so, although he reduced sail to the lowest point, he still spread a little canvas.

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The men were filled with apprehension, not only for their lives but, such was their covetousness, for the treasure they had captured, for they stood about a hundred chances to one of losing the ship. Each squall that swept down upon them was harder than the one before. Each time the vessel almost went over on her beam ends, for Morgan would not luff until the last moment, since each time that he did so and lost way temporarily he found himself driven bodily nearer the land. The men would have mutinied had it not been patent to the most stupid mind that their only salvation lay in Morgan. Never had that despicable villain appeared to better advantage than when he stood on the weather quarter overlooking the ship, his long gray hair blown out in the wind, fighting against a foe whose strength was not to be measured by the mind of man, for his

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life and his ship.

Hornigold and Teach, grasping the wheel assisted by two of the ablest seamen, were steering the ship with exquisite precision. Sweat poured from their brows at the violence of the labor required to control the massive helm. The men lay to windward on the deck, or grouped in clusters around the masts, or hung to the life lines which had been passed in every direction. At Morgan's side stood Velsers and Raveneau, prime seamen both.

"What think ye, gentlemen?" asked Morgan, at last pointing to the point looming fearfully close ahead of them. "Can we weather it?"

"Never!" answered de Lussan, shaking his head. "Well, it has been a short cruise and a merry one. Pity to lose our freightage and lives."

"And you, Velsers?"

"No," said the German, "it can't be done. Why did we ever come to this cursed coast?"

"Avast that!" cried Morgan, thinking quickly. "Gentlemen, we'll club-haul the ship."

"The water's too deep, my captain, to give holding ground to the anchor," urged Raveneau shrugging his shoulders.

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"It shoals yonder, I think," answered Morgan. "We'll hold on until the last minute and then try."

"'Tis wasted labor," growled Velsers.

"And certain death to hold on," added the Frenchman.

"Have you anything else to propose, sirs?" asked Morgan sharply. "We can't tack ship against this wind and sea. There's no room to wear. What's to do?"

The men made no answer.

"Forward there!" cried the old buccaneer, and it was astonishing the force and power with which he made himself heard in spite of the roar of the wind and the smash of the sea. "Get the lee anchor off the bows there! L'Ollonois?"

"Ay, ay."

"Run a hawser from the anchor in aft here on the quarter. We'll club-haul the ship. See the cable clear for running."

"Very good, sir," cried the Frenchman, summoning the hardiest hands and the most skilful to carry out his commander's orders.

"Ready it is, sir," answered Hornigold, tightening his grasp on the spokes and nodding his head to his superior.

"To the braces, lads! Obey orders sharply. It's our last chance."

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The water was roaring and smashing against the shore not a cable's length away. Usually in those latitudes it deepened tremendously a short distance from the low water mark, and there was a grave question whether or not the anchor, with the scope they could give it, would reach bottom. At any rate it must be tried, and tried now. Morgan had held on as long as he dared. Another minute and they would strike.

"Down helm!" he shouted. "Flow the head sheets! Round in on the fore braces, there! Show that canvas aft!"

The lateen sail on the crossjack yard had been furled, and Morgan, to force her head around, directed the after guard to spring into the mizzen-rigging with a bit of tarpaulin and by exposing it and their bodies to the wind to act as a sail in assisting her to head away from the shore.

"Helm-a-lee! Hard-a-lee!" cried Hornigold, who with his men was grasping the spokes like a giant.

Slowly the old galleon swung up into the wind, the waves beating upon her bows with a noise like crashes of thunder. A moment she hung. She could go no farther.

"She's in irons! Swing that yard!" roared Morgan. "Cut and veer away forward!"

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There was a splash as the anchor dropped overboard.

"Hands on that hawser!" he shouted. "Everybody walk away with it!"

The whole crew apparently piled on to the anchor hawser in the hope of pulling the ship's stern around so that the wind would take her on the other bow. She was still hanging in the wind and driving straight on shore.

"Haul away, for God's sake!" cried Morgan; but the hawser came in board through their hands with a readiness and ease that showed the anchor had not taken the ground. The drag of the cable to the anchor, however, and the still unspent impetus of the first swing, turned the galleon's stern slightly to windward. Her head began slowly to fall off.

"She stays! She makes it!" cried the captain. "Meet her with the helm! Let go and haul! Cut away the hawser!"

It had been a tremendous feat of seamanship and bade fair to be successful. It was yet touch and go, however, and the breakers were perilously near. They were writhing around her forefoot now, yet the wind was at last coming in over the other bow.

"We're safe!" cried Morgan. "Flatten in forward! Haul aft the sheets and braces!"

At that instant there was a terrific crash heard above the roar of the tempest. The foretopmast of the *Almirante Recalde* carried sharply off at the hounds. Relieved of the pressure, she shot up into the wind once more and drove straight into the seething seas. They were lost with their treasure, their hopes, and their crimes! At the mercy of wind and wave!

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The men were as quick to see the danger as was Morgan. They came rushing aft baring their weapons, pouring curses and imprecations upon him. He stood with folded arms, a scornful smile on his old face, looking upon them, Carib watching and ready by his side. In another second, with a concussion which threw them all to the deck, the doomed ship struck heavily upon the sands.

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BOOK III

WHICH TREATS OF THE TANGLED LOVE AFFAIRS OF THE PEARL OF CARACAS

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CHAPTER IX

DISCLOSES THE HOPELESS PASSION BETWEEN DONNA MERCEDES DE LARA AND CAPTAIN DOMINIQUE ALVARADO, THE COMMANDANTE OF LA GUAYRA

Captain Dominique Alvarado stood alone on the plaza of the ancient castle which for over a century had been the home of the governors of La Guayra. He was gazing listlessly down over the parapet which bordered the bare sheer precipice towering above the seaport town. There was nothing in his eyes, but a great deal in his heavy heart.



Captain Alvarado, who filled the honorable station of commandante of the port, was a soldier of proven courage. The *protégé* and favorite officer of his serene highness the Count Alvaro de Lara, Grandee of Spain and Viceroy of Venezuela, he had been honored with great responsibilities, which he had discharged to the satisfaction of his master. From a military point of view the office of Governor of La Guayra, which he then filled, was of sufficient importance to entitle him to high position and much consideration in the vice-regal court of Caracas.

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Of unknown parentage, Alvarado had been received into the family of the viceroy when an infant. He had been carefully reared, almost as he had been de Lara's son, and had been given abundant opportunity to distinguish himself. In the course of his short life he had managed to amass a modest fortune by honorable means. He was young and handsome; he had been instructed, for the viceroy had early shown partiality for him, in the best schools in the New World. His education had been ripened and polished by a sojourn of several years in Europe, not only at the court of Madrid but also at that of Versailles, where the Count de Lara had been sent as ambassador to the Grand Monarch during a period in which, for the sake of supervising the education of his only daughter, he had temporarily absented himself from his beloved Venezuela. That an unknown man should have been given such opportunities, should have been treated with so much consideration, was sufficient commentary on the unprecedented kindness of heart of the old Hidalgo who represented the failing power of His Most Catholic Majesty of Spain, Carlos II., the Bewitched, in the new world. Whatever his origin, therefore, he had been brought up as a Spanish soldier and gentleman, and the old count was openly proud of him.

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With assured station, ample means, increasing reputation; with youth, health, and personal good looks, the young Governor should have been a happy man. But it was easy to see from the heavy frown upon his sunny face—for he was that rare thing in Spain, a blue-eyed blond who at first sight might have been mistaken for an Englishman—that his soul was filled with melancholy. And well it might be, for Alvarado was the victim of a hopeless passion for Mercedes de Lara, the Viceroy's daughter, known from one end of the Caribbean to the other, from her beauty and her father's station, as the Pearl of Caracas.

Nor was his present sadness due to unrequited passion, for he was confident that the adoration

of his heart was met with an adequate response from its object. Indeed, it was no secret to him that Mercedes loved him with a devotion which matched his own. It was not that; but her father had announced his intention to betroth the girl to Don Felipe de Tobar y Bobadilla, a young gentleman of ancient lineage and vast wealth, who had been born in America and was the reputed head in the Western Hemisphere of the famous family whose name he bore.

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The consent of Donna Mercedes to the betrothal had not been asked. That was a detail which was not considered necessary by parents in the year of grace 1685, and especially by Spanish parents. That she should object to the engagement, or refuse to carry out her father's plan never crossed the Viceroy's imagination. That she might love another, was an idea to which he never gave a thought. It was the business of a well-brought-up Spanish maiden to be a passive instrument in the carrying out of her father's views, especially in things matrimonial, in which, indeed, love found little room for entrance. But Donna Mercedes loved Captain Alvarado and she cared nothing for Don Felipe. Not that Don Felipe was disagreeable to her, or to any one. He was a Spanish gentleman in every sense of the word, handsome, distinguished, proud, and gallant—but she did not, could not, love him. To complicate matters still further de Tobar was Captain Alvarado's cherished companion and most intimate friend.

The progress of the love affair between Alvarado and Donna Mercedes had been subjective rather than objective. They had enjoyed some unusual opportunities for meeting on account of the station the former filled in the Viceroy's household and the place he held in his heart, yet the opportunities for extended freedom of intercourse between young men and women of the gentler class in those days, and especially among Spaniards of high rank, were extremely limited. The old count took care to see that his daughter was carefully watched and shielded; not because he suspected her of anything, for he did not, but because it was a habit of his people and his ancestry. The busy life that he led, the many employments which were thrust upon him, his military duties, had kept the days of the young soldier very full, and under the most favorable circumstances he would have had little time for love making. Fortunately much time is not required to develop a love affair, especially in New Spain and near to the equator.

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But though they had enjoyed brief opportunity for personal intercourse, the very impossibilities of free communication, the difficulties of meeting, had but added fuel and fire to their affection. Love had flamed into these two hearts with all the intensity of their tropic blood and tropic land. Alvarado's passion could feed for days and grow large upon the remembrance of the fragrance of her hand when he kissed it last in formal salutation. Mercedes' soul could enfold itself in the recollection of the too ardent pressure of his lips, the burning yet respectful glance he had shot at her, by others unperceived, when he said farewell. The memory of each sigh the tropic breeze had wafted to her ears as he walked in attendance upon her at some formal function of the court was as much to her as the flower which she had artfully dropped at his feet and which had withered over his heart ever since, was to him.

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The difficulties in the way of the exchange of those sweet nothings that lovers love to dwell upon and the impossibility of any hoped for end to their love making intensified their passion. Little or nothing had been spoken between them, but each knew the other loved. For the first moment the knowledge of that glorious fact had sufficed them—but afterwards they wanted more. Having tasted, they would fain quaff deeply. But they could see no way by which to manage the realization of their dreams.

The situation was complicated in every possible way for Alvarado. Had he been a man of family like his friend, de Tobar, he would have gone boldly to the Viceroy and asked for the hand of his daughter, in which case he thought he would have met with no refusal; but, being ignorant of his birth, having not even a legal right to the name he bore, he knew that the proud old Hidalgo would rather see his daughter dead than wedded to him. Of all the ancient splendors of the Spanish people there was left them but one thing of which they could be proud—their ancient name. De Lara, who belonged to one of the noblest and most distinguished families of the Iberian Peninsula, would never consent to degrade his line by allying his only daughter to a nobody, however worthy in other respects the suitor might prove to be.

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Again, had Mercedes' father been any other than the life-long patron and friend to whom he literally owed everything that he possessed, such was the impetuosity of Alvarado's disposition that, at every hazard, he would have taken the girl by stealth or force from her father's protection, made her his wife, and sought an asylum in England or France, or wherever he could. So desperate was his state of mind, so overwhelming his love that he would have shrunk from nothing to win her. Yet just because the Viceroy had been a father to him, just because he had loved him, had been unexampled in his kindness and consideration to him, just because he reposed such absolutely unlimited confidence in him, the young man felt bound in honor by fetters that he could not break.

And there was his friendship for de Tobar. There were many young gallants about the vice-regal court who, jealous of Alvarado's favor and envious of his merits, had not scrupled in the face of his unknown origin to sneer, to mock, or to slight—so far as it was safe to do either of these things to so brave and able a soldier. Amid these gilded youths de Tobar with noble magnanimity and affection had proved himself Alvarado's staunchest friend. A romantic attachment had sprung up between the two young men, and the first confidant of de Tobar's love affairs had been Alvarado himself. To betray his friend was almost as bad as to betray his patron. It was not to be thought of.

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Yet how could he, a man in whose blood—though it may have been ignoble for aught he knew—

ran all the passions of his race with the fervor and fire of the best, a man who loved, as he did, the ground upon which the Señorita de Lara walked, stand by tamely and see her given to another, no matter who he might be? He would have given the fortune which he had amassed by honorable toil, the fame he had acquired by brilliant exploits, the power he enjoyed through the position he had achieved, the weight which he bore in the councils of New Spain, every prospect that life held dear to him to solve the dilemma and win the woman he loved for his wife.

He passed hours in weary isolation on the plaza of the great castle overlooking the stretched-out town upon the narrow strand with the ceaseless waves beating ever upon the shore from the heavenly turquoise blue of the Caribbean wavering far into the distant horizon before him. He spent days and nights, thinking, dreaming, agonizing, while he wrestled vainly with the problem. Sometimes he strove to call to his mind those stern resolutions of duty which he had laid before himself at the beginning of his career, and to which he had steadfastly adhered in the pursuit of his fortunes; and he swore that he would be true to his ideals, that the trust reposed in him by the Viceroy should not be betrayed, that the friendship in which he was held by de Tobar should never be broken, that he would tear out of his heart the image of the woman he loved. And then, again, he knew that so long as that heart kept up its beating she would be there, and to rob him of her image meant to take away his life. If there had been a war, if some opportunity had been vouchsafed him to pour out, in battle against the enemy, some of the ardor that consumed him, the situation would have been ameliorated; but the times were those of profound peace. There was nothing to occupy his mind except the routine duties of the garrison.

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Spain, under the last poor, crazed, bewitched, degenerate descendant of the once formidable Hapsburgs, had reached the lowest depths of ignominy and decay. Alone, almost, under her flag Venezuela was well governed—from the Spanish standpoint, that is; from the native American point of view the rule of even the gentlest of Spaniards had made a hell on earth of the fairest countries of the new continent. Of all the cities and garrisons which were under the sway of the Viceroy de Lara, La Guayra was the best appointed and cared for. But it did not require a great deal of the time or attention from so skilled a commander as Alvarado to keep things in proper shape. Time, therefore, hung heavily on his hands. There were few women of rank in the town, which was simply the port of entry for St. Jago de Leon across the mountains which rose in tree-clad slopes diversified by bold precipices for ten thousand feet back of the palace, and from the commoner sort of women the young captain held himself proudly aloof, while his love safeguarded him from the allurements of the evil and the shameless who flaunted their iniquity in every seaport on the Caribbean.

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On the other side of the mountain range after a descent of several thousand feet to a beautiful verdant valley whose altitude tempered the tropic heat of the low latitude into a salubrious and delightful climate, lay the palace of the Viceroy and the city which surrounded it, St. Jago, or Santiago de Leon, commonly called the City of Caracas.

Many a day had Alvarado turned backward from the white-walled, red-roofed town spread out at his feet, baking under the palms, seething in the fierce heat, as if striving to pierce with his gaze the great cordilleras, on the farther side of which in the cool white palace beneath the gigantic ceibas the queen of his heart made her home. He pictured her at all hours of the day; he dwelt upon her image, going over again in his mind each detail of her face and figure. The perfume of her hand was still fragrant upon his lips; the sound of her voice, the soft musical voice of Andalusia, still vibrated in his ear; her burning glance pierced him even in his dreams like a sword.

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He was mad, mad with love for her, crazed with hopeless passion. There seemed to be no way out of his misery but for him to pass his own sword through his heart, or to throw himself from the precipice, or to plunge into the hot, cruel blue of the enveloping Caribbean—the color of the sea changed in his eye with his temper, like a woman's mood. Yet he was young, he hoped in spite of himself. He prayed—for he was not old enough to have lost faith—and he planned. Besides, he was too brave a soldier to kill himself, and she was not yet married. She was not formally betrothed, even; although it was well known that her father looked favorably upon de Tobar's suit, no formal announcement had been made of it as yet. So in spite of his judgment he dreamed—the thoughts of youth and love are long, long thoughts, indeed.

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That morning the young captain, engrossed in his emotions, was not aware of the approach of a messenger, until the clank of the man's sword upon the stone flags of the plaza caused him to lift his head. He was a soldier, an officer of the bodyguard of the Viceroy, and he bore in his hand a letter sealed with the de Lara coat of arms. The messenger saluted and handed the packet to the captain.

"Yesterday evening, His Excellency, the Viceroy, charged me to deliver this letter to you to-day."

"Fadrique," called Alvarado, to a servitor, "a flagon of wine for the cavalier. By your leave, sir," he continued with formal politeness, opening the packet and reading the message:

"TO THE CAPTAIN ALVARADO, COMMANDANTE OF LA GUAYRA.

GREETING:

As one faithful to the fortunes of our family we would crave your honorable presence at our palace in Santiago to-morrow evening. In view of your service and devotion, we have done you the honor to appoint you as one of the witnesses to the formal betrothal of our daughter, Donna Mercedes, to your friend, Don Felipe de

Tobar. After that, as we have received appeals for help from the Orinoco country, we propose to lead His Most Catholic Majesty's Imperial troops thither in person to overawe the natives; and, reposing full trust in your fidelity and honor, we deign to commit the Donna Mercedes to your safe keeping in our city of La Guayra, until we return. Therefore make your preparations accordingly.

Given under our hand and seal,

DE LARA, *Viceroy.*"

It had come! The old man, as a last token of his respect, had nominated him as a witness to the contract which robbed him forever of hope and happiness. The young man went white before the keen eye of the messenger, who, in common with other officers of the Viceroy's court, suspected what was, indeed, concealed from no one save the father and lover. The world swam before his vision. The blue sea seemed to rise up and meet the green hills until he could not distinguish the one from the other. His heart almost stopped its beating, yet summoning his resolution he recovered himself by an effort that left him trembling, the sweat beading his forehead.

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"Are you in a state for a return journey at once, señor?" he asked of the young officer.

"At your service, captain."

"That's well. Say to His Excellency, the Viceroy, that I thank him for the honor he does me. I shall wait upon him to-morrow and obey his commands."

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CHAPTER X

HOW DONNA MERCEDES TEMPTED HER LOVER AND HOW HE STROVE VALIANTLY TO RESIST HER APPEALS



Ivarado was alone in the cabinet of the Viceroy, to which his rank and the favor in which His Excellency held him gave him access at all times.



He had ridden all day over the rough road that winds over the mountains from La Guayra to Caracas. The storm which had rushed down the mountain-side all afternoon matched the tumult in his soul, and the sheets of rain blown upon him by the fierce wind had not cooled the fever of his agitation. The unusual tempest was one of the most terrific that had swept over the coast in years. He had marked as he rode a huge ship far to seaward, staggering along under shortened canvas and laboring tremendously in the heavy seas. But his thoughts were so centered upon the situation in which he found himself that he had not particularly noticed the vessel, although passing ships were infrequent sights off the port of La Guayra. Pale, haggard, and distraught from his mental struggle he had crossed the pass at the summit of the mountain and descended into the fertile valley now adrip with rain and looking almost cold under the gray sky, and had presented himself at the palace of the Viceroy.

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He had changed his apparel after his reception and his old sergeant had polished his breastplate until it fairly blazed with light, for though the occasion was one of peace he had felt that he could better sustain his part in the military uniform in which he had won his only title to consideration. He schooled himself to go through that part with the resolution of a Spanish gentleman. Although there was no evidence of gentle blood save such as was presented by his actions, he had always cherished the hope that could the secret of his birth be revealed he would not be found unfit for the honors that he had won and the ambitions that he cherished. Consequently his appearance in the brilliantly lighted hall of the palace among the gay courtiers resplendent in magnificent attire, blazing with jewels, threw a somber note over the proceedings.

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It was as a soldier he had won fame and the consideration of the Viceroy; in no other capacity, so far as any man knew, had he the right to enter that assemblage of the rich and well born. It was as a soldier he would perform that hardest of all duties which had ever been laid upon him by his friend and patron, the Governor.

Pale, stern, composed, he stood an iron figure of repression. So severe was the constraint that he put upon himself that he had given no sign of his emotion, even at the near approach of Donna Mercedes, and the hand which signed his name beneath her father's as the principal witness was as steady as if it held merely the sword in some deadly combat. He endured passively the affectionate greetings of the happy de Tobar, who was intoxicated at the assurance afforded by the betrothal of the coming realization of all his hopes. He sustained with firmness the confidence of the Viceroy and the admissions de Lara made to him in private, of his pleasure in the suitable and fortunate marriage which was there arranged. He even bore without breaking one long, piteous appeal which had been shot at him from the black eyes of the unhappy Mercedes.

To her he seemed preternaturally cold and indifferent. He was so strong, so brave, so successful. She had counted upon some interposition from him, but the snow-capped Andes were no colder than he appeared, their granite sides no more rigid and unsympathetic. It was with a feeling almost of anger and resentment at last that she had signed the betrothal contract.

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But the restraint on the man was more than he could bear. The cumulative force of the reproach of the woman he loved, the confidence of the Viceroy, the rapturous happiness of his best friend, was not to be endured longer. Pleading indisposition, he early begged leave to withdraw from the festivities which succeeded the completion of the betrothal ceremony and the retirement of the ladies. At the suggestion of the Viceroy, who said he desired to consult with him later in the evening, he went into the deserted cabinet of the latter.

The palace was built in the form of a quadrangle around an open patio. A balcony ran along the second story passing the Viceroy's cabinet, beyond which was his bedroom and beyond that the apartments of his daughter. The rain had ceased and the storm had spent itself. It was a calm and beautiful night, the moon shining with tropic splendor through the open window dispensed with the necessity of lights. There was no one in the cabinet when he entered, and he felt at last able to give way to his emotion; Mercedes though she was not married was now lost to him beyond recourse. After the women withdrew from the hall with Donna Mercedes there was no restraint put upon the young nobles, and from the other side of the patio came the sound of uproarious revelry and feasting—his friends and comrades with generous cheer felicitating the happy bridegroom that was to be. Alvarado was alone, undisturbed, forgotten, and likely to remain so. He put his head upon his hands and groaned in anguish.

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"Why should it not have been I?" he murmured. "Is he stronger, braver, a better soldier? Does he love her more? O Mother of God! Riches? Can I not acquire them? Fame? Have I not a large measure? Birth? Ah, that is it! My father! my mother! If I could only know! How she looked at me! What piteous appeal in her eyes! What reproach when I stood passive cased in iron, with a breaking heart. O my God! My God! Mercedes! Mercedes!"

In his anguish he called the name aloud. So absorbed and preoccupied in his grief had he been that he was not aware of a figure softly moving along the balcony in the shadow. He did not hear a footfall coming through the open window that gave into the room. He did not realize that he had an auditor to his words, a witness to his grief, until a touch soft as a snowflake fell upon his fair head and a voice for which he languished whispered in his ear:

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"You called me; I am come."

"Señorita Mercedes!" he cried, lifting his head and gazing upon her in startled surprise. "How came you here?" he added brusquely, catching her hands with a fierce grasp in the intensity of his emotion as he spoke.

"Is this my greeting?" she answered, surprised in turn that he had not instantly swept her to his heart.

She strove to draw herself away, and when he perceived her intent he opened his hands and allowed her arms to fall by her side.

"I have been mistaken," she went on piteously, "I am not wanted."

She turned away and stood full in the silver bar of the moonlight streaming through the casement. Her white face shone in the light against the dark background of the huge empty room—that face with its aureole of soft dark hair, the face of a saint, pale yet not passionless, of the heaven heavenly, yet with just enough of earthly feeling in her eyes to attest that she was a very woman after all.

"Go not," he cried, catching her again and drawing her back.

Gone were his resolutions, shattered was his determination, broken was his resistance. She was here before him, at all hazards he would detain her. They were alone together, almost for the first time in their lives. It was night, the balmy wind blew softly, the moonlight enveloped them. Such an opportunity would never come again. It was madness. It was fatal. No matter. She should not go now.

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"I heard you," she murmured, swaying toward him. "I heard—you seemed to be—suffering. I do not know why—something drew me on. You whispered—you were speaking—I—listened. I came nearer. Was your heart breaking, too? Despise me!"

She put her face in her hands. It was a confession she made. A wave of shame swept over her.

"Despise you? Ah, God help me, I love you!"

And this time he gathered her in his arms, and drew her back into the deeper shadow.

"And you were so cold," she whispered. "I looked at you. I begged you with all my soul before I signed. You did nothing, nothing! O Mother of God, is there no help?"

"Dost love me?"

"With all my soul," she answered.

"Poor—"

"Nay——"

"Obscure——"

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"Nay——"

"Lowly—perhaps ignobly born——"

"Nay, love, these are mere words to me. Rich or poor, high or low, noble or ignoble, thou only hast my heart. It beats and throbs only for thee. I have thought upon thee, dreamed upon thee, loved thee. I can not marry Don Felipe. I, too, have the pride of the de Lara's. My father shall find it. I signed that contract under duress. You would do nothing. Oh, Alvarado, Alvarado, wilt thou stand by and let me be taken into the arms of another? But no, I shall die before that happens."

"Donna Mercedes," cried the unhappy young man, "I love thee, I adore thee, I worship thee with all my heart and soul! Were it not a coward's act I would have plunged my dagger into my breast ere I witnessed that betrothal to-night."

"Thou shouldst first have sheathed it in mine," she whispered. "But could'st find no better use for thy weapon than that?"

"Would you have me kill Don Felipe?"

"No, no, but defend me with it. There are hidden recesses in the mountains. Your soldiers worship you. Take me away, away into the undiscovered countries to the southward. A continent is before you. We will find a new Mexico, carve out a new Peru with your sword, though I want nothing but to be with you, alone with you, my soldier, my lover, my king!"

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"But your plighted word?"

"'Tis nothing. My heart was plighted to you. That is enough. Let us go, we may never have the chance again," she urged, clinging to him.

A fearful struggle was going on in Alvarado's breast. What she proposed was the very thing he would have attempted were the circumstances other than they were. But his patron, his friend, his military duty, his honor as a soldier—the sweat beaded his forehead again. He had made up his mind at the betrothal to give her up. He had abandoned hope; he had put aside possibilities, for he could see none. But here she was in his arms, a living, breathing, vital, passionate figure, her heart beating against his own, pleading with him to take her away. Here was love with all its witchery, with all its magic, with all its power, attacking the defenses of his heart; and the woman whom he adored as his very life, with all the passion in his being, was urging, imploring, begging him to take her away. He was weakening, wavering, and the woman who watched him realized it and added fuel to the flame.

"The love I bear your father!" he gasped.

"Should it bind where mine breaks? I am his daughter."

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"And Don Felipe is my personal friend."

"And my betrothed, but I hesitate not."

"My oath as a soldier——"

"And mine as a woman."

"Gratitude—duty——"

"Oh, Alvarado, you love me not!" she cried. "These are the strongest. I have dreamed a dream. Lend me your dagger. There shall be no awakening. Without you I can not bear——"

As she spoke she plucked the dagger from the belt of the young soldier, lifted the point gleaming in the moonlight and raised it to her heart. He caught it instantly.

"No, no!" he cried. "Give back the weapon."

The poniard fell from her hand.

"Thou hast taken me, I thank thee," she murmured, thinking the battle won as he swept her once more in his arms. This time he bent his head to her upturned face and pressed kiss after kiss upon the trembling lips. It was the first time, and they abandoned themselves to their transports with all the fire of their long restrained passion.

"And is this the honor of Captain Alvarado?" cried a stern voice as the Viceroy entered the room. "My officer in whom I trusted? Death and fury! Donna Mercedes, what do you here?"

"The fault is mine," said Alvarado, stepping between the woman he loved and her infuriated father. "I found Donna Mercedes in the cabinet when I came in. She strove to fly. I detained her—by force. I poured into her ear a tale of my guilty passion. Mine is the fault. She repulsed me. She drove me off."

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"The dagger at your feet?"

"She snatched it from me and swore to bury it in her heart unless I left her. I alone am guilty."

He lied instantly and nobly to save the woman's honor.

"Thou villain, thou false friend!" shouted the Viceroy, whipping out his sword.

He was beside himself with fury, but there was a characteristic touch of magnanimity about his next action; so handsome, so splendid, so noble, in spite of his degrading confession, did the young man look, that he gave him a chance.

"Draw your sword, Captain Alvarado, for as I live I shall run you through!"

Alvarado's hand went to his belt, he unclasped it and threw it aside.

"There lies my sword. I am dishonored," he cried. "Strike, and end it all."

"Not so, for Christ's sake!" screamed Mercedes, who had heard as if in a daze. "He hath not told the truth. He hath lied for me. I alone am guilty. I heard him praying here in the still night and I came in, not he. I threw myself into his arms. I begged him to take me away. He spoke of his love and friendship for you, for Don Felipe, his honor, his duty. I did indeed seize the dagger, but because though he loved me he would still be true. On my head be the shame. Honor this gentleman, my father, as I—love him."

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She flung herself at her father's feet and caught his hand.

"I love him," she sobbed, "I love him. With all the power, all the intensity, all the pride of the greatest of the de Laras I love him."

"Is this true, Captain Alvarado?"

"Would God she had not said so," answered the young man gloomily.

"Is it true?"

"I can not deny it, my lord, and yet I am the guilty one. I was on the point of yielding. Had you not come in we should have gone away."

"Yet you had refused?"

"I—I—hesitated."

"Refused my daughter! My God!" whispered the old man. "And you, shameless girl, you forced yourself upon him? Threw yourself into his arms?"

"Yes. I loved him. Did'st never love in thine own day, my father? Did'st never feel that life itself were as nothing compared to what beats and throbs here?"

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"But Don Felipe?"

"He is a gallant gentleman. I love him not. Oh, sir, for God's sake——"

"Press your daughter no further, Don Alvaro, she is beside herself," gasped out Alvarado hoarsely. "'Tis all my fault. I loved her so deeply that she caught the feeling in her own heart. When I am gone she will forget me. You have raised me from obscurity, you have loaded me with honor, you have given me every opportunity—I will be true. I will be faithful to you. 'Twill be death, but I hope it may come quickly. Misjudge me not, sweet lady. Happiness smiles not upon my passion, sadness marks me for her own. I pray God 'twill be but for a little space. Give me some work to do that I may kill sorrow by losing my life, my lord. And thou, Donna Mercedes, forget me and be happy with Don Felipe."

"Never, never!" cried the girl.

She rose to her feet and came nearer to him. Her father stood by as if stunned. She laid her arms around Alvarado's neck. She looked into her lover's eyes.

"You love me and I love you. What matters anything else?"

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"Oh, my lord, my lord!" cried Alvarado, staring at the Viceroy, "kill me, I pray, and end it all!"

"Thou must first kill me," cried Mercedes, extending her arms across her lover's breast.

"Donna Mercedes," said her father, "thou hast put such shame upon the name and fame of de Lara as it hath never borne in five hundred years. Thou hast been betrothed to an honorable gentleman. It is my will that the compact be carried out."

"O my God! my God!" cried the unhappy girl, sinking into a chair. "Wilt Thou permit such things to be?"

"And, Alvarado," went on the old man, not heeding his daughter's piteous prayer. "I know not thy parentage nor to what station thou wert born, but I have marked you from that day when, after Panama, they brought you a baby into my house. I have watched you with pride and joy. Whatever responsibility I have placed before you, you have met it. Whatever demand that hard circumstances have made upon you, you have overcome it. For every test there counts a victory. You have done the State and me great service, none greater than to-night. With such a temptation before thee, that few men that I have come in contact with in my long life could have resisted, you have thrown it aside. You and your honor have been tried and not found wanting. Whatever you may have been I know you now to be the finest thing on God's earth, a Spanish

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gentleman! Nay, with such evidence of your character I could, were it possible, have set aside the claims of birth and station——"

"Oh, my father, my father!" interrupted the girl joyously.

"And have given you Donna Mercedes to wife."

"Your Excellency——"

"But 'tis too late. The betrothal has been made; the contract signed; my word is passed. In solemn attestation before our Holy Church I have promised to give my daughter to Don Felipe de Tobar. Nothing can be urged against the match——"

"But love," interjected Mercedes; "that is wanting."

"It seems so," returned the Viceroy. "And yet, where duty and honor demand, love is nothing. Donna Mercedes, thou hast broken my heart. That a Spanish gentlewoman should have shown herself so bold! I could punish thee, but thou art mine all. I am an old man. Perhaps there is some excuse in love. I will say no more. I will e'en forgive thee, but I must have your words, both of you, that there shall be no more of this; that no other word of affection for the other shall pass either lip, forever, and that you will be forever silent about the events of this night."

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"Speak thou first, Captain Alvarado," said the girl.

"You have loved me," cried the young man, turning toward Donna Mercedes, "and you have trusted me," bowing to the old man. "Here are two appeals. God help me, I can not hesitate. Thou shalt have my word. Would this were the last from my lips."

"And he could promise; he could say it!" wailed the broken-hearted woman. "O my father, he loves me not! I have been blind! I promise thee, on the honor of a de Lara! I have leaned upon a broken reed."

"Never," cried the old man, "hath he loved thee so truly and so grandly as at this moment."

"It may be, it may be," sobbed the girl, reeling as she spoke. "Take me away. 'Tis more than I can bear."

Then she sank prostrate, senseless between the two men who loved her.

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CHAPTER XI

WHEREIN CAPTAIN ALVARADO PLEDGES HIS WORD TO THE VICEROY OF VENEZUELA, THE COUNT ALVARO DE LARA, AND TO DON FELIPE DE TOBAR, HIS FRIEND



"We must have assistance," cried the Viceroy in dismay. "Alvarado, do you go and summon ——"

"Into the women's apartments, my lord?"

"Nay, I will go. Watch you here. I trust you, you see," answered the old man, promptly running through the window and out on the balcony toward the apartments of his daughter. He went quickly but making no noise, for he did not wish the events of the evening to become public.

Left to himself, Alvarado, resisting the temptation to take the prostrate form of his love in his arms and cover her cold face with kisses, knelt down by her side and began chafing her hands. He thought it no breach of propriety to murmur her name. Indeed he could not keep the words from his lips. Almost instantly the Viceroy departed there was a commotion in the outer hall. There was a knock on the door, repeated once and again, and before Alvarado could determine upon a course of action, Don Felipe burst into the room followed by Señora Agapida, the duenna of Donna Mercedes.

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"Your Excellency——" cried the old woman in agitation, "I missed the Señorita. I have searched ——"

"But who is this?" interrupted de Tobar, stepping over to where Alvarado still knelt by the prostrate girl. "'Tis not the Viceroy!" He laid his hand on the other man's shoulder and recoiled in surprise.

"Dominique!" he exclaimed. "What do you here and who——"

"Mother of God!" shrieked the duenna. "There lies the Donna Mercedes!"

"She is hurt?" asked Felipe, for the moment his surprise at the presence of Alvarado lost in his anxiety for his betrothal.

"I know not," answered the distracted old woman.

"She lives," said Alvarado, rising to his feet and facing his friend. "She hath but fainted."

"Water!" said Señora Agapida.

Both men started instantly to hand her the carafe that stood on a table near by. Don Felipe was nearer and got it first.

Señora Agapida loosened the dress of the young woman and sprinkled her face and hands with the water, laying her head back upon the floor as she did so and in a moment the girl opened her eyes. In the darkness of the room, for no lamp had as yet been lighted, she had not recognized in her bewilderment who was bending over her, for Alvarado had forced himself to draw back, yielding his place to de Tobar as if by right.

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"Alvarado!" she murmured.

"She lives," said Don Felipe, with relief and jealousy mingled in his voice, and then he turned and faced the other.

"And now, Señor Alvarado, perhaps you will be able to explain how you came to be here alone, at this hour of night, with my betrothed, and why she calls thy name! By St. Jago, sir, have you dared to offer violence to this lady?"

His hand went to his sword. To draw it was the work of a moment. He menaced the young soldier with the point.

"I could kill you as you stand there!" he cried in growing rage. "But the memory of our ancient friendship stays my hand. You shall have a chance. Where is your weapon!"

"Strike, if it please you. I want nothing but death," answered Alvarado, making no effort whatever to defend himself.

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"Hast deserved it at my hands, then?" exclaimed the now infuriated de Tobar.

"Stay!" interrupted the Viceroy re-entering the room. "What means this assault upon my captain? Donna Mercedes?"

"She revives," said the duenna.

"Is it thou, Señora?" said the Viceroy. "I sought thee unavailingly."

"Your Highness," said the old woman, "I missed the señorita and found her here."

"And how came you unbidden into my private cabinet, Don Felipe?"

"Your Excellency, Señora Agapida found me in the corridor. She was distraught over her lady's absence. We knocked. There was no answer. We entered. I crave your pardon, but it was well I came, for I found my betrothed and my best friend alone, together, here," he pointed gloomily. "A Spanish gentleman alone at this hour of the night with—"

"Silence!" thundered the Viceroy. "Would'st asperse my daughter's name? Darest thou—By heaven, you hold a weapon in your hand. I am old but—Guard thyself!" he called, whipping out his sword with astonishing agility.

"I can not fight with you," said de Tobar lowering his point, "but for God's sake, explain!"

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"The Donna Mercedes is as pure as heaven," asserted Alvarado.

"Then why did you bid me strike and stand defenseless a moment since?"

"Because I love her and she is yours."

"Death!" shouted de Tobar. "Take up thy sword!"

"Stay," broke in the old Viceroy quickly, "keep silent, Alvarado, let me tell it all. I am her father. I would consult with the captain upon the journey of the morrow and other matters of state. With us here was my daughter. Is there aught to provoke thy jealousy or rage in this? Overcome by—er—the events of the day she fainted. One of us had to go for aid. 'Twas not meet that the young man should go to the women's apartments, I left them together."

"Alone?" queried de Tobar.

"Ay, alone. One was my daughter, a de Lara, and she was senseless. The other was almost my son, I knew him. He had proved himself. I could trust him."

"Your Excellency, I thank you," cried Alvarado, seizing the hand of the old nobleman and carrying it to his lips.

"You said you loved her," said de Tobar turning to Alvarado.

"And so I do," answered Alvarado, "but who could help it? It is an infection I have caught from my friend."

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"Have you spoken words of love to her? Have you pleaded with her? Did you meet here by appoint?"

"Don Felipe," cried Donna Mercedes, who had kept silent at first hardly comprehending and then holding her breath at the dénouement. "Hear me. Captain Alvarado's manner to me has been coldness itself. Nay, he scarcely manifested the emotion of a friend."

She spoke with a bitterness and resentment painfully apparent to Alvarado, but which in his bewilderment Don Felipe did not discover.

"I swear to you, señor," she went on cunningly, "until this hour I never heard him say those words, 'I love you.' But this scene is too much for me, I can not bear it. Help me hence. Nay, neither of you gentlemen. With Señora Agapida's aid I can manage. Farewell. When you wish to claim me, Don Felipe, the betrothal shall be carried out and I shall be yours. Good-night."

De Tobar sprang after her and caught her hand, raising it respectfully to his lips.

"Now, señor," he cried turning back, "we can discuss this question unhindered by the presence of the lady. You said you loved her. How dare you, a man of no birth, whose very name is an assumption, lift your eyes so high?" [Pg 195]

"This from you, my friend," cried Alvarado, turning whiter than ever at this insult.

"Sir," interposed the voice of the Viceroy, "restrain yourself. 'Tis true we know not the birth or name of this young man whom I have honored with my confidence, upon whom you have bestowed your friendship. Perchance it may be nobler than thine, or mine, perchance not so, but he hath ever shown himself—and I have watched him from his youth—a gentleman, a Spanish gentleman whom all might emulate. You wrong him deeply—"

"But he loved her."

"What of that?" answered the Viceroy.

"Ay," cried Alvarado. "I do love her, and that I make no secret of it from you proves the sincerity of my soul. Who could help loving her, and much less a man in my position, for, in so far as was proper in a maiden, she has been kind to me since I was a boy. I cherish no hopes, no dreams, no ambitions. I locked my passion within my breast and determined to keep it there though it killed me. To-night, with her helpless at my feet, thrown on my pity, it was wrung from me; but I swear to you by my knightly honor, by that friendship that hath subsisted between us of old, that from this hour those words shall never pass my lips again; that from this hour I shall be as silent as before. Oh, trust me! I am sadly torn. Thou hast all, I nothing! If thou canst not trust me—I bade you strike before, strike now and end it all. What supports life when love is denied? Friendship and duty. If these be taken from me, I am poor indeed, and I'd liefer die than live in shame. Your Excellency, bid him strike." [Pg 196]

"Thy life is not thine," answered the older man, "it belongs to Spain. We have fallen on evil times and thy country needs thine arm. Thou hast said aright. Señor de Tobar," he cried, "he is thy friend. Take him back to thy affection. I am an old man and a father, but were I young and one so beautiful crossed my path as Donna Mercedes—by Our Lady he hath excuse for anything! He speaks the truth, though it be to his own hurt. Canst stand unmoved, señor, in thy happiness before such misery as that?"

"Dominique, forgive me!" cried de Tobar, "I was wrong. I am ashamed. Thou couldst not help it. I forgive thee. I love thee still."

He made as if to embrace his friend, but Alvarado held him off.

"Wilt trust me fully, absolutely, entirely?"

"With all my life," answered de Tobar.

"Thou shalt be tried," said the Viceroy. "We march toward the Orinoco in three days. I had proposed to establish Donna Mercedes at La Guayra under care of Alvarado." [Pg 197]

"Not now, your Excellency," cried the young man.

"Nay, I shall, provided de Tobar is willing."

"A test, a test!" answered that young man. "Gladly do I welcome it. As thou lovest me, and as I love thee, guard thou my betrothed."

"Your Excellency, take me with you to the Orinoco, and let Don Felipe stay at home with Donna Mercedes in La Guayra."

"I am no experienced soldier to command a town," protested de Tobar.

"Nay," said the Viceroy, "it shall be as we have said. Wilt take the charge?"

"Ay, and defend it with all my soul!" answered Alvarado firmly.

"Señor Alvarado and Don Felipe, you have shown yourselves true Spanish gentlemen this night, hidalgos of whom Spain may well be proud," cried the Viceroy in pleased and proud content. "To you, de Tobar, I shall give my daughter with assurance and pride, and were there another to bear my name I could wish no better husband for her than you, my poor friend. Now, the hour is late, I have much to say to Alvarado. Don Felipe, you will pardon me? Good-night." [Pg 198]

"Good-night, your Excellency," promptly returned de Tobar. "I shall see you in the morning, Dominique, ere you set forth for La Guayra. I love thee and trust thee, my friend." [Pg 199]

CHAPTER XII

SHOWS HOW DONNA MERCEDES CHOSE DEATH RATHER THAN GIVE UP CAPTAIN ALVARADO, AND WHAT BEFEL THEM ON THE ROAD OVER THE MOUNTAINS

They set forth early in the morning. There was a cool freshness in the air from the storm of the day before and if they wished to avoid the necessity of traveling in the heat of the day early departure was necessary. Although the season was summer in a tropic land not far from the equator, the altitude of Caracas lowered the ordinary temperature to an agreeable degree, but after they crossed the pass of La Veta and began the descent toward La Guayra they would be within the confines of one of the hottest localities on the face of the globe.



Early as it was, the Viceroy and his officers, including, of course, de Tobar, were assembled in the patio to bid the travelers godspeed. While de Lara gave a few parting directions to Alvarado, Don Felipe took advantage of the opportunity and of his position as the publicly affianced of Donna Mercedes to address her a few words in farewell, which she received with listless indifference that did not bode well for the future happiness of either of them. The final preparations were soon over. Don Felipe lifted Donna Mercedes to the saddle of her Spanish jennet; some of the other gentlemen assisted the Señora Agapida to the back of the sure-footed mule which she had elected as her mount; Alvarado saluted and sprang to the back of his mettlesome barb, and, followed by a half-dozen troopers who constituted the escort, the rear being brought up by servants with pack mules carrying the personal baggage of the two ladies, the little cavalcade moved off, the gentlemen in the Viceroy's suite standing bareheaded in the doorway as they disappeared under the trees and began the ascent toward the pass.

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With the whispered assurance of his friend, "I trust you," still ringing in his ear, with the sound of the Viceroy's stern voice, "I know not what danger could befall my child in this peaceful time, but I have a premonition that something threatens, and I charge you to guard her welfare and happiness with your life," still fresh in his mind, Alvarado, whose white, haggard face showed that he had passed a sleepless night, rode at the head of the column. Some distance in front of him rode a trooper, for there were even then thieves, wandering bands of masterless men who levied bloody toll on travelers from the capitol whenever they got opportunity. Next to the captain came the sergeant of the little guard, then the two women, followed closely by two more of the soldiers, after that the little pack train, which he had ordered to close up and keep in touch after they left the city, and, last of all, the two remaining soldiers to bring up the rear.

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The soldiers, servants, and muleteers were in high spirits. There was little danger to be apprehended, for the party was too strong to fear attack from any of the brigand bodies, and the military order of march was taken more as a matter of habit than from any special need. The day was pleasant, the scenery, though familiar, was at the same time grand and beautiful, and they were happy—all, that is, except Donna Mercedes, the duenna, and Alvarado.

The worthy Señora Agapida with womanly shrewdness more than suspected the true state of affairs. Indeed, Mercedes, who loved the old woman, who had been as a mother to her, her own mother having died when she was a mere child, had scarcely taken the trouble to conceal her misery, and the old woman's heart was wrung whenever she looked at the drooping figure at her side. She would fain have brought the flush of happiness to the face of the girl she loved, by throwing her into the arms of Alvarado; but, as a distant connection of the de Laras herself, the worthy dame had her own notions of pride, and her honor would not permit her to do anything for which the Viceroy could properly fault her. The ancient duenna was an indifferent horsewoman, too, and although she had the easiest and surest footed beast of the party she journeyed with many sighs and groans of dissatisfaction. She bravely made an effort at first to cheer up her charge, but soon perceived that the task was beyond her powers, so she rode along in a silence unbroken save by her frequent ejaculations.

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When Mercedes had met Alvarado early in the morning she had acknowledged his profound salutation with the curtest and coldest of nods. She was furiously and bitterly angry with him; for, between duty, honor, friendship, and her love, he had not chosen her. She knew that he loved her. She had known it a long time, and, if she had the slightest doubt, the sincerity with which he had spoken the night before, the fierce, passionate fervor of the kisses that he had pressed upon her lips, his utter abandonment to his passion, had more than satisfied her. Yet, when she had offered to throw everything to the winds—love, duty, obedience, if he would only take her away—he had hesitated. With her, a woman who had all Venezuela at her feet, held in his arms, he had repulsed her, refused her! He had heard the open confession of her overwhelming love for him, and he had resisted her! With the feel of her heart beating against his own, he had strained her to his breast and prated of honor and duty!

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She was mad with anger and disappointment. She loathed him; she hated him; she raged against him in her heart. Why had he not killed de Tobar where he stood, seized her in his arms, braved the anger of her father, and galloped away—anywhere out into the mysterious southland where they could be together? Well and good, she would marry Don Felipe. She would assume a

happiness that she could not feel and kill him with the sight of it. He had disdained her; he should suffer, suffer in proportion to his love, such torments as he had made her suffer last night—shame, disappointment, indignation.

She had not slept the entire night, either, thinking these things, yet it had not all been pain. How nobly he had lied to save her! He, to whom a lie was worse than death. He had tried to assume dishonor for her sake. He loved her; yes, there was no doubt of it. She closed her eyes with the thought and her whole being was filled with exquisite anguish. He loved her, he was made for her, yet when he might have taken her he refused. De Tobar was indeed a brave and gallant gentleman, but his qualities were as moonlight to the sunlight compared to those of Alvarado. In spite of herself, though the mere suggestion of it angered her, she found herself obliged to grant that there was something noble in that position he had assumed which so filled her with fury. It was not, with him, a question of loving duty and honor more than herself, but it was a question of doing duty and preserving honor, though the heart broke and the soul was rent in the effort.

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Because he had the strength to do these things, not to betray his friend, not to return ingratitude to her father, who had been a father to him too, not to be false to his military honor; because he had the strength to control himself, she felt dimly how strong his passion might be. In spite of her careful avoidance of his eyes, her cold demeanor, that morning, she had marked the haggard, pale face of the young soldier to whom she had given her heart, which showed that he, too, had suffered. She watched him as he rode, superb horseman that he was, at the head of the little cavalcade. Tall, straight, erect, graceful, she was glad that he rode in advance with his back to her, so that she might follow him with her eyes, her gaze unheeded by any but Señora Agapida, and for her she did not care.

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As he turned at intervals to survey his charges, to see that all were keeping closed up and in order, by furtive glances she could mark with exultation the pallor that had taken the place of the ruddy hue on the fair cheek of her lover. She could even note the black circles under the blue eyes beneath the sunny hair, so different from her own midnight crown.

How this man loved her! She could see, and know, and feel. Great as was her own passion, it did not outweigh his feeling. A tempest was raging in his bosom. The girl who watched him could mark the progress of the storm in the deeps of his soul, for his face told the tale of it.

And, indeed, his thoughts were bitter. What must she think of him? He had been a fool. Happiness had been his for the taking, and he had thrown it away. Why had he not brushed de Tobar out of his path, silenced the Viceroy—no, not by death, but by binding him fast, and then taken the woman he loved and who loved him, for she had proved it by her utter abandonment of herself to him? Those old soldiers who had served him for many years would have followed him wherever he led. The Viceroy's arm was long, but they could have found a haven where they could have been together. God had made them for each other and he had refused. He had thrust her aside. He had pushed the cup of happiness from his own lips with his own hand.

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Honor was a name, duty an abstraction, gratitude a folly. What must she think of him? There had been no reservation in her declaration of affection. For him she was willing to give up all, and though he had vowed and protested in his heart that there was nothing she could ask of him that he would not grant her, he had been able to do nothing after all.

He wished it was all to do over again. Now it was too late. To the chains of duty, honor, gratitude, had been added that of his plighted word. Knowing his love, de Tobar, his friend, had trusted him. Knowing his daughter's love, the Viceroy had also trusted him. He was locked with fetters, bound and sealed, helpless. And yet the temptation grew with each hour. He had suspected, he had dreamed, he had hoped, that Mercedes loved him, now he was sure of it. Oh, what happiness might have been his!

What was this mystery about his birth? He had been picked up a baby in a deserted village outside of Panama. He had been found by the young Count de Lara, who had led his troops to the succor of that doomed town, which, unfortunately, he had only reached after the buccaneers had departed. Search had been made for his parents but without success. The Viceroy finding none to claim the bright-faced baby, had given him a name and had caused him to be brought up in his own household. There was nothing in his apparel to distinguish him save the exquisite fineness and richness of the material. Thrown around his neck had been a curiously wrought silver crucifix on a silver chain, and that crucifix he had worn ever since. It lay upon his breast beneath his clothing now. It was the sole object which connected him with his past.

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Who had been his father, his mother? How had a baby so richly dressed come to be abandoned in a small obscure village outside the walls of Panama, which would have escaped the ravages of the buccaneers on account of its insignificance, had it not lain directly in their backward path. They had destroyed it out of mere wantonness.

And there was another thought which often came to him and caused his cheeks to burn with horror. If, as his clothing had indicated, he had been the child of wealth, did not his obscure position indicate that he was at the same time the child of shame?

Since he had reached man's estate he had thought of these things often and had prayed that in some way, at some time, the mystery might be solved, for the suspense was worse than any assurance, however dreadful. He had often thought with longing upon his father, his mother. This morning in the bitterness of his heart he cursed them for the situation in which he found himself. He despaired at last of ever finding out anything. What mattered it now? He might be of the

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proudest and most honorable lineage in New Spain, a Soto-Mayor, a Bobadilla, even a de Guzman. It would advantage him nothing since he had lost Mercedes. In spite of himself he groaned aloud, and the girl riding a little distance behind him heard the sound of anguish in his voice.

Her heart, which had been yearning toward him with increasing force, was stirred within her bosom.

"Ride thou here," she said suddenly to Señora Agapida, "I go forward to speak with Captain Alvarado."

"But, señorita, thy father——"

"Is it not permitted that I speak with the captain of the soldiery who escort me?"

"Certainly, if I am by."

"I do not choose to have it so," replied Mercedes, with all the haughtiness of her father. "Remain here. I will return presently."

Brushing her aside with an imperious wave of her hand and a threatening glance before which the poor duenna quailed, for her charge had never shown such spirit before, Mercedes struck her Spanish jennet with the whip she carried, passed around the intervening soldier, who courteously gave way to her, and reined in her steed by Alvarado's horse. So close, indeed, was she to the captain that she almost touched him. It was good to see the light leap in his eyes, the flush come into his pale cheek as he became aware of her presence.

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"Donna Mercedes!" he cried in surprise. "Is anything wrong? Where is the Señora Agapida?"

"Nothing is wrong. I left her there."

"Shall I summon her?"

"Art afraid to speak to me, to a woman, alone, sir captain?"

"Nay, señorita, but 'tis unseemly——"

"Wouldst thou lesson me in manners, master soldier?" cried the girl haughtily.

"God forbid, lady, but thy father——"

"He laid no injunction upon me that I should not speak to you, sir. Is that forbidden?"

"Of course not, but——"

"But what, sir? It is your own weakness you fear? You were strong enough last night. Have you, by chance—repented?"

There was such a passionate eagerness in her voice, and such a leaping hope for an affirmative answer in the glance she bent upon him, that he could scarce sustain the shock of it. His whole soul had risen to meet hers, coming as she came. He trembled at her propinquity. The voice of the girl thrilled him as never before.

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The sergeant who followed them, out of respect for their confidences checked the pace of his troop horse somewhat and the two advanced some distance from him out of earshot. The unhappy duenna watched them with anxious eyes, but hesitated to attempt to join them. Indeed, the way was blocked for such an indifferent horsewoman as she by the adroit manœuvres of the sergeant. He was devoted to his young commander and he had surmised the state of affairs also. He would have had no scruples whatever in facilitating a meeting, even an elopement. The two lovers, therefore, could speak unobserved, or at least unheard by any stranger.

"Lady," said Alvarado at last, "I am indeed afraid. You make the strong, weak. Your beauty—forgive me—masters me. For God's sake, for Christ, His Mother, tempt me not! I can stand no more—" he burst forth with vehemence.

"What troubles thee, Alvarado?" she said softly.

"Thou—and my plighted word."

"You chose honor and duty last night when you might have had me. Art still in the same mind?"

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"Señorita, this subject is forbidden."

"Stop!" cried the girl, "I absolve you from all injunctions of silence. I, too, am a de Lara, and in my father's absence the head of the house. The duty thou hast sworn to him thou owest me. Art still in the same mind as last night, I say?"

"Last night I was a fool!"

"And this morning?"

"I am a slave."

"A slave to what? To whom?"

"Donna Mercedes," he cried, turning an imploring glance upon her, "press me no further. Indeed,

the burden is greater than I can bear."

"A slave to whom?" she went on insistently, seeing an advantage and pressing it hard. She was determined that she would have an answer. No conviction of duty or feeling of filial regard was strong enough to overwhelm love in this woman's heart. As she spoke she flashed upon him her most brilliant glance and by a deft movement of her bridle hand swerved the jennet in closer to his barb. She laid her hand upon his strong arm and bent her head close toward him. They were far from the others now and the turns of the winding road concealed them.

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"A slave to whom? Perhaps to—me?" she whispered.

"Have mercy on me!" he cried. "To you? Yes. But honor, duty——"

"Again those hateful words!" she interrupted, her dark face flushing with anger. "Were I a man, loved I a woman who loved me as I—as I—as one you know, I would have seized her in spite of all the world! Once she had fled to the shelter of my arms, while life beat in my heart none should tear her thence."

"Thy father——"

"He thinks not of my happiness."

"Say not so, Donna Mercedes."

"'Tis true. It is a matter of convenient arrangement. Two ancient names, two great fortunes cry aloud for union and they drown the voice of the heart. I am bestowed like a chattel."

"Don Felipe——"

"Is an honorable gentleman, a brave one. He needs no defense at my hands. That much, at least, my father did. There is no objection to my suitor save that I do not love him."

"In time—in time you may," gasped Alvarado.

"Dost thou look within thine own heart and see a fancy so evanescent that thou speakest thus to me?"

"Nay, not so."

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"I believe thee, and were a thousand years to roll over my head thine image would still be found here."

She laid her tiny gloved hand upon her breast as she spoke in a low voice, and this time she looked away from him. He would have given heaven and earth to have caught her yielding figure in his arms. She drooped in the saddle beside him in a pose which was a confession of womanly weakness and she swayed toward him as if the heart in her body cried out to that which beat in his own breast.

"Mercedes! Mercedes!" he said, "you torture me beyond endurance! Go back to your duenna, to Señora Agapida, I beg of you! I can stand no more! I did promise and vow in my heart—my honor—my duty——"

"Ay, with men it is different," said the girl, and the sound of a sob in her voice cut him to the heart, "and these things are above love, above everything. I do not—I can not understand. I can not comprehend. You have rejected me—I have offered myself to you a second time—after the refusal of last night. Where is my Spanish pride? Where is my maidenly modesty? That reserve that should be the better part of woman is gone. I know not honor—duty—I only know that though you reject me, I am yours. I, too, am a slave. I love you. Nay, I can not marry Don Felipe de Tobar. 'Twere to make a sacrilege of a sacrament."

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Alvarado threw his right arm around her, and with a force superhuman dragged her from the saddle.

"Thy father——"

"I have done my best to obey him. I can no more."

"What wilt thou do?"

"This!" cried the girl desperately.

The road at the point they had arrived wound sharply around the spur of the mountain which rose above them thousands of feet on one side and fell abruptly away in a terrific precipice upon the other. As she spoke she struck her horse again with the whip. At the same time by a violent wrench on the bridle rein she turned him swiftly toward the open cliff. Quick as she had been, however, Alvarado's own movement was quicker. He struck spur into his powerful barb and with a single bound was by her side, in the very nick of time. Her horse's forefeet were slipping among the loose stones on the edge. In another second they would both be over. Alvarado threw his right arm around her and with a force superhuman dragged her from the saddle, at the same time forcing his own horse violently backward with his bridle hand. His instant promptness had saved her, for the frightened horse she rode, unable to control himself, plunged down the cliff and was crushed to death a thousand feet below.

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CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH CAPTAIN ALVARADO IS FORSWORN AND WITH DONNA MERCEDES IN HIS ARMS
BREAKS HIS PLIGHTED WORD

My God!" cried the young soldier hoarsely, straining her to his breast, while endeavoring to calm his nervous and excited horse. "What would you have done?"

"Why didn't you let me go?" she asked, struggling feebly in his arms. "It would all have been over then."

"I could not, I love you."

The words were wrung from him in spite of himself by her deadly peril, by her desperate design which he had only frustrated by superhuman quickness and strength. He was pale, shaking, trembling, unnerved, for her. He scarce knew what he said or did, so little command had he over himself.

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As he spoke those words "I love you," so blissful for her to hear, she slipped her arm around his neck. It was not in mortal man to resist under such



circumstances. He forgot everything—honor, duty, his word, everything he threw to the winds. Before the passion which sought death when denied him his own powers of resistance vanished. He strained her to his breast and bent his head to kiss her. Again and again he drank at the upturned fountain of affection, her lips. The shock had been too much for him. Greater for him than for her. He had seen her upon the verge of eternity. She thought nothing of that in her present joy. She only realized that she was in his arms again, that he had kissed her, and between the kisses he poured out words that were even greater caresses.

The others were far behind. They were alone upon the mountain-side with the rocks behind and the great sapphire sea of the Caribbean before them. He held her close to his breast and they forgot everything but love as they gently pricked along the road. It was near noon now, and as the road a furlong farther debouched into an open plateau shaded by trees and watered by a running brook which purled down the mountain-side from some

inaccessible cloud-swept height it was a fitting place to make camp, where the whole party, tired by a long morning's travel, could repose themselves until the breeze of afternoon tempered the heat of the day. Here he dismounted, lifted her from horse, and they stood together, side by side.

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"You have saved me," she whispered, "you have drawn me back from the death that I sought. God has given me to you. We shall never be parted."

"I am a false friend, an ungrateful servitor, a forsworn man, a perjured soldier!" he groaned, passing his hand over his pale brow as if to brush away the idea consequent upon his words.

"But thou hast my love," she whispered tenderly, swaying toward him again.

"Yes—yes. Would that it could crown something else than my dishonor."

"Say not so."

She kissed him again, fain to dispel the shadow that darkened his face.

"I had been faithful," he went on, as if in justification, "had I not seen thee on the brink of that cliff, and then thou wert in my arms—I was lost—"

"And I was found. I leaped to death. I shut my eyes as I drove the horse toward the cliff, and I awakened to find myself in your arms—in heaven! Let nothing take me hence."

"It can not be," he said, "I must go to the Viceroy when he returns from the Orinoco war, and tell him that I have betrayed him."

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"I will tell him," she answered, "or wilt thou tell him what I tell thee?" she went on.

"Surely."

"Then say to him that I sought death rather than be given to Don Felipe or to any one else. Tell him you saved me on the very brink of the cliff, and that never soldier made a better fight for field or flag than thou didst make for thy honor and duty, but that I broke thee down. I had the power, and I used it. The story is as old as Eden—the woman tempted—"

"I should have been stronger—I should not have weakened. But I shall fight no more—it is all over."

"Ah, thou canst not," she whispered, nestling closer to him. "And tell my father that should harm come to thee, if, in their anger, he or de Tobar lay hand upon thee, it will not advantage their plans, for I swear, if there be no other way, I will starve myself to death to follow thee!"

"I can not shelter myself behind a woman."

"Then I will tell them both myself," she cried. "You shall know, they shall know, how a Spanish woman can love."

"And thou shalt know, too," answered Alvarado firmly, "that though I break my heart, I, an unknown, can expatiate his guilt with all the pride of most ancient lineage and birth highest of them all."

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It was a brave speech, but he did not release his hold upon Mercedes and in spite of his words when, confident that whatever he might say, however he might struggle, he was hers at last, she smiled up at him again, he kissed her.

"When go you to my father, Señor Alvarado?" she asked.

"When he returns from the Orinoco."

"And that will not be until—"

"Perhaps a month."

"Wilt love me until then?"

"I shall love thee forever."

"Nay, but wilt thou tell me so, with every day, every week, every hour, every moment, with kisses like to these?"

"Oh, tempt me not!" he whispered; but he returned again and again her caresses.

"Ah, my Alvarado, if you have once fallen, what then? Is not one kiss as bad as a thousand?"

"Be it so; we will be happy until that time."

"One month, one month of heaven, my love, after that let come what may," she answered, her cheeks and eyes aflame, her heart throbbing with exquisite pain in her breast. They would enjoy the day, the future could take care of itself.

"Some one approaches!" he said at last, and at the same moment the rest of the party came around the bend of the road. The poor duenna was consumed with anxiety and remorse. [Pg 222]

"Bernardo," said Alvarado to the sergeant, "we will take our siesta here. Unsaddle the horses and prepare the noon-day meal under the trees. Send one of the troopers ahead to bid Fadrique stop on the road until we rejoin him, keeping good guard. Señora Agapida, you must be tired from the long ride. Let me assist you to dismount."

"The Señorita Mercedes!" she asked, as he lifted her to the ground. "Where is her horse?"

"He slipped and fell," answered the girl promptly.

"Fell? Madre de Dios!"

"Yes, over the cliff. Captain Alvarado lifted me from the saddle just in time."

"I shall make a novena of devotion to St. Jago for thy preservation, sweet Mercedes," cried the duenna, "and you, young sir, must have a strong arm——"

"It is ever at your service," answered Alvarado gravely, bowing before her.

The old woman's heart went out to the gallant young man, so handsome, so brave, so strong, so distinguished looking.

"Why," she mused under her breath, "could he not have been the one?"

By this time the little place was filled with soldiers, attendants, and muleteers. Some kindled fires, others unpacked hampers loaded with provisions, others prepared a place where the party might rest, and as, to restore order out of this confusion, Alvarado turned hither and thither he was followed in all his movements by the lovely eyes of the woman who had broken him, and who had won him. [Pg 223]

During the interval of repose the young man allowed his party the two lovers were constantly together. Alvarado had made a faint effort to go apart and leave Mercedes to herself, but with passionate determination she had refused to allow it. She had thrown prudence to the winds. Careless of whoever might see, of whoever might comment, heedless of the reproving duenna, indifferent to ancient practice, reckless of curious glances, she had insisted upon accompanying the captain and he had yielded. He was doomed in his own soul to death. He intended to tell the Viceroy and de Tobar everything, and he had no doubt that one or the other would instantly kill him. It was a fate to which he would make no resistance. Meanwhile he would enjoy the day. There was a melancholy pleasure, too, in the thought, for this morning had assured him of it, that whatever awaited him Mercedes would belong to no one else. If they killed him she had sworn that she would not survive him. If they strove to force her into the arms of another, she had declared she would die rather than comply, and he believed her. [Pg 224]

Other women in like circumstances might have resorted to a convent, but Mercedes was not of the temperament which makes that calm harbor an inviting refuge. If she could not have Alvarado, she would simply die—that was all. Under the circumstances, therefore, as he had already forfeited his own esteem, he hesitated no more. Indeed, before the passion of the woman he loved, who loved him, it was not possible. In her presence he could do nothing else. They abandoned themselves with all the fervor of youth and passion to their transports of affection. They wandered away from the others and by the side of the brook beneath the shelter of the trees remained together and whispered all the love that beat within their freed breasts. They might die to-morrow, to-day they lived and loved. Fain would they have prolonged the Elysian dream forever, but the descending sun of the afternoon at last warned Alvarado, if they would reach La Guayra that night, that they must resume their journey. Reluctantly he gave the order to mount.

This time, utterly indifferent to the Señora Agapida, Mercedes, mounted on one of the led horses, rode openly by Alvarado's side. Sustained by his presence, constantly in touch with him, she made the way down the difficult wanderings of the rocky mountain trail. They watched the sun set in all its glory over the tropic sea. The evening breeze blew softly about them riding side by side. Then the night fell upon them. Over them blazed the glorious canopy of the tropic stars, chief among them the fiery Southern Cross, emblem of the faith they cherished, the most marvelous diadem in the heavens. There below them twinkled the lights of La Guayra. The road [Pg 225]

grew broader and smoother now. It was almost at the level of the beach. They would have to pass through the town presently, and thence up a steep rocky road which wound around the mountain until they surmounted the cliff back of the city and arrived at the palace of the Governor upon the hillside, where Mercedes was to lodge. An hour, at least, would bring them to their destination now. There was nothing to apprehend. The brigands in the fastnesses of the mountains or the savages, who sometimes strayed along the road, never ventured so near the town.

Fadrique, by Alvarado's orders, had fallen back nearer the main body so as to be within call.

"We shall be there in a little while. See yonder, the lights of the town," said the captain.

"While thou art with me," said the girl, "it matters little where we are. There are but two places in the world now——"

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"And those are——?"

"Where thou art and where thou art not. If I may only be with thee, if we may be together, I want nothing else."

She had scarcely spoken before the sound of a cry followed by a shot broke on the night.

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BOOK IV

IN WHICH IS RELATED AN ACCOUNT OF THE TAKING OF LA GUAYRA BY THE BUCCANEERS AND THE DREADFUL PERILS OF DONNA MERCEDES DE LARA AND CAPTAIN ALVARADO IN THAT CITY

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CHAPTER XIV

WHEREIN THE CREW OF THE GALLEON INTERCEPTS THE TWO LOVERS BY THE WAY

he terrific impact of the huge ship on the sand among the breakers which thundered and beat upon her sides with overwhelming force came just in the nick of time for Morgan. Had the disaster been delayed a second longer the furious buccaneers would have cut him down where he stood. Even the officers were angered beyond measure at him for their present situation, which threatened the loss of the vast treasure already gained in the ship, although they had consented to Morgan's proposition to attack La Guayra and Caracas, and the captain was in no way responsible for the storm and the wreck which jeopardized their booty and their future. Therefore it is probable that none of them, unless it were Teach, would have interfered to save Morgan, and he would have been swept from his feet by the savage men and instantly killed, in spite of all that he, or Carib, or any one else could have done. But the violence of the shock when the ship took ground threw them to the deck, and they forgot for the instant their bloody purpose of vengeance in the inevitableness of their approaching danger; they were checked in their mad anger for a few seconds and given a moment for reflection, that moment convinced them that they could not yet dispense with the services of their captain. With black rage and white fear striving for mastery in their hearts, they rose to their feet and faced him with menacing faces and threatening gestures.

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"What's to be done now?" questioned one bolder than the rest.

"Now's the time," roared the undaunted Morgan, striving to make himself heard by all above the thundering seas, "to show your courage, lads!"

He had quickly observed that the force with which she had been driven on the shoals had shoved the galleon's nose firmly in the sand. She had been caught just before she took ground by a tremendous roller and had been lifted up and hurled far over to starboard. Although almost on her beam ends, her decks inclining landward, the strongly-built ship held steady in spite of the tremendous onslaughts of the seas along her bilge.

"Take heart, men!" he cried. "Observe. She lies still and secure. 'Tis a stout hulk and will take a tremendous battering before she breaks. We may yet save ourselves."

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"And the treasure?" roared one.

"Ay, and the treasure."

"I think the storm has about blown itself out," interposed old Hornigold, shouting out at this instant. "Look you, mates," he cried, pointing to westward, "it clears! The sun'll set fair to-night."

"The bo's'n is right," cried Morgan. "But first of all we must take no chances with our lives. Even though we lose the ship we can seize another. The world is full of treasure and we can find it. Now I want some one to carry a line ashore through the breakers. Who will volunteer?"

"I," said Carib instantly.

"I need you here," answered Morgan, who did not purpose to be deprived of that bodyguard upon whose watchfulness his life had so often depended.

"I'll go," exclaimed young Teach, breaking through the crowd.

"That's a brave heart!" said Morgan. "A line here!"

Instantly a light line was forthcoming. Teach tore off his jacket, laid aside his weapons, kicked off his shoes, took a turn of the line around his waist, made it fast, wrung Morgan's hand, watched his chance, leaped overboard, was caught by an onrushing wave and carried far toward the shore. The ebb of the roller carried him back seaward some distance, but he swam forward madly, and the next wave brought him a little nearer the beach. He was driven backward and forward, but each time managed to get a little nearer the shore line. [Pg 233]

The whole ship's company stared after him, spontaneously cheering and yelling cries of encouragement in spite of the fact that he could not hear a single sound in the roaring, raging seas. Morgan himself tended the line, skilfully paying it out when necessary. In a few moments, although the time seemed hours to the watchers, the feet of Teach touched the shore, and although the terrific undertow of the wave that had dropped him there almost bore him back again, yet by a superhuman exertion he managed to stagger forward, and the next moment they saw him fall prostrate on the sand.

Had he fainted or given way? They looked at him with bated breath but after a little space they saw him rise slowly to his feet and stagger inland toward a low point where a lofty palm tree was writhing and twisting in the fierce wind. He was too good a seaman not instantly to see what was required of him, for, waving his hand toward the ship he at once began to haul in the line. Ready hands had bent a larger rope to it, which was succeeded by a third, strong enough to bear a man's weight. The buccaneer hauled this last in with great difficulty, for the distance was far and the wet rope was heavy. He climbed up and made it fast to the tree and then waited. As soon as he had done so there was a rush on the ship for the line which had been made fast inboard temporarily. Morgan, however, interposed between the crew and the coveted way to safety. [Pg 234]

"Back!" he shouted. "One at a time, and the order as I appoint! You, L'Ollonois, and you, and you," he cried, indicating certain men upon whom he could depend. "Go in succession. Then haul a heavier rope ashore. We'll put a traveler with a bo's'n's chair on it, and send these nuns and the priests first of all."

"Do we have to wait for a lot of wimmin and papists?" growled one man among the frightened rascals.

"You have to wait until the ship breaks up beneath your feet, if it is my pleasure," said Morgan, coolly, and they slunk back again, cowed. He was master of the situation once more.

There was something about that man that enforced obedience, whether they would or no. His orders were promptly obeyed and intelligently carried out by L'Ollonois and his men, who first went ashore. A heavy hawser was dragged through the surf and made fast high up on the sturdy palm tree. On it they rigged a traveler and the chair, and then the frightened nuns were brought forward from the cabin. [Pg 235]

The women were sick with apprehension. They knew, of course, that the ship had struck, and they had been expecting instant death. Their prayers had been rudely interrupted by Morgan's messenger, and when they came out on deck in that stern tempest, amid that body of wild, ruthless men, their hearts sank within them. At the sight of those human fiends they would fain have welcomed that watery grave from which they had just been imploring God to save them. When they discovered that their only means of safety lay in making that perilous passage through the waters which overwhelmed the bight of rope in which hung the boatswain's chair, they counted themselves as dead. Indeed, they would have refused to go had it not been for the calm and heroic resolution of the abbess, their leader, Sister Maria Christina, who strove to assuage their fears.

"Hornigold," said Morgan, "are you still faithful to me in this crisis?"

"I shall obey you in all things—now," answered the boatswain. [Pg 236]

"Swear it."

"By the old buccaneer faith," said the One-Eyed, again adding the significant adverb, "now."

For a wonder, the captain paid no attention to the emphasis on the word, "now."

"Can you keep your pistols dry?"

"I can wrap them in oilskin and thrust them in my jacket."

"Go to the shore, then," said Morgan, "and receive these women. March them away from the men to yonder clump of palms, and guard them as you would your life. If any man approach you or them for any purpose, shoot him dead without a word. I'll see that the others have no weapons. D'ye understand?"

"Ay, and shall obey."

"Go!"

The boatswain swung himself into the chair and the men on the other end of the traveler pulled him to the other shore, none the worse for his wetting. He opened his jacket, found the weapons dry, and waved his hand as a sign to Morgan that he was all right.

"Which of you women will go first?" asked Morgan.

He turned instinctively to the tall abbess, towering among her shrinking sisters. She indicated first one and then another among the poor captives, and as they refused, she turned to Morgan and, with a grave dignity, said in Spanish, of which he was a master, that she would go first to show the way, and then the others would be in better heart to follow. She sat down on the boatswain's chair—which, was simply a bit of wood held like the seat of a swing in a triangle of rope—made the sign of the cross, and waved her hand. She was hauled ashore in an instant with nothing worse to complain of than a drenching by the waves. By Hornigold's direction she walked past him toward the clump of palms which Morgan had indicated.

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One after another of the women were sent forward until the whole party was ashore. Then the Spanish priests took their turn, and after these reached the sand the rest of the crew were sent ashore. Morgan was careful to indicate each one's turn, so that he preserved a balance between the more reputable and the more degraded members of the crew, both on ship and shore. Among the last to go were the maroon and de Lussan, each armed as Hornigold had been. They had both received instructions, one to station himself at the palm tree, the other to cover the hawser where it ran along the shore before it entered the water. These precautionary orders which he had given were necessary, for when the last man had been hauled ashore and Morgan stepped into the chair for his turn, one of the infuriated buccaneers, watching his chance, seized his jack-knife, the only weapon that he had, for Morgan had been careful to make the men leave their arms on the ship, and made a rush for the rope to cut it and leave the captain to his fate. But de Lussan shot him dead, and before the others could make a move Morgan stepped safely on the sand.

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"That was well done," he cried, turning to the Frenchman.

"Ah, mon capitaine," answered the other, "it was not from affection, but because you are necessary to us."

"Whatever it may be," returned the old man, "I owe much to you and scuttle me, I'll not forget it."

The Frenchman, indifferent to Morgan's expressions of gratitude, shrugged his shoulders, turned away, and made no reply.

The transportation of so many people across the slender line had taken a long time. The sun, just beginning to break through the riven clouds, was near its setting; night would soon be upon them. They must hurry with what was yet to be done. Morgan sent Teach and the Brazilian back to the ship with instructions to gather up enough weapons to arm the crew and to send them ashore. This was promptly done. Indeed, communication was not difficult now that the force of the gale was abating. The ship had been badly battered but still held together, and would hold unless the storm came up again. As the arms came ashore Morgan served them out to those men whom he considered most reliable; and, after throwing out a strong guard around the band, the rest sought shelter around huge driftwood fires which had been kindled by the use of flint and steel. There was hardly a possibility they would be observed in that deserted land, but still it was wise to take precaution.

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Morgan ordered the women and priests to be double-guarded by the trustiest, and it was well that he did so. He gave old Hornigold particular charge of them. The buccaneers were hungry and thirsty, but they were forced to do without everything until morning when they could get all they wanted from the ship. So they tightened their belts and disposed themselves about the fires as best they could to get what rest they might.



But de Lussan shot him dead, and before the others could make a move, Morgan stepped safely on the sand.

Morgan and the officers drew apart and consulted long and earnestly over the situation. They could never make the ship seaworthy again. To build a smaller one out of her timbers would be the work of months and when it was finished it could not possibly carry the whole crew. To march westward toward the Isthmus meant to encounter terrific hardships for days; their presence would speedily become known, and they would be constantly menaced or attacked by troops from the heavily garrisoned places like Porto Bello and Carthagena. Back of them a short distance away lay La Guayra. It could be taken by surprise, Morgan urged, and easily captured. If they started to march westward the Indians would apprise the Spaniards of their presence, and they would have to fight their way to the Pacific. If they took La Guayra, then the Viceroy, with the treasure of his palace and the opulent city of Caracas would be at their mercy. They could ravage the two towns, seize the first ship that came to the roadstead, and make their way to the Isthmus safely and speedily. As to the treasure on the galleon, the buccaneer captain proposed to unload it and bury it in the sand, and after they had captured La Guayra it would be easy to get it back again.

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Morgan's counsel prevailed, and his was the resolution to which they came. The council of war broke up thereafter, and those not told off to watch with the guards went to sleep near the fires. Morgan, under the guardianship of the faithful Black Dog, threw himself upon the ground to catch a few hours' rest.

The next morning the wind had died away and the sea was fairly calm. The men swam out to the galleon, found her still intact though badly strained, and by means of boats and rafts, working with persistent energy, succeeded in landing and burying the treasure under the very palm tree which held the rope that had given them salvation.

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Morgan's plan was an excellent one, the best that could be suggested in the straits they then were, and it received the hearty assent of all the men. It took them all day to land the treasure and make their other preparations, which included the manufacture of several rude scaling ladders, pieces of timber with cross pieces nailed upon them, which could be used in surmounting the walls of the town. In the evening the order of march was arranged and their departure set for the morrow. They had saved their treasure, they had food in plenty now, and with dry clothes and much rum they began to take a more cheerful view of life. They were fairly content once more.

The next day, in the afternoon, for he desired to approach the town at nightfall, Morgan gave the order to advance. He was as much of a soldier as a sailor and sent ahead a party of choice spirits under Teach, while the main body followed some distance behind. As the shades of evening descended a messenger from the advance guard came back with the news that a party of travelers had been seen coming down the mountain; that they comprised a half-dozen troopers, a number of slaves, a heavily laden pack train, and two women.

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Teach had stationed his men under the trees at a bend of the road around which the travelers had to pass, and he awaited Morgan's orders. Taking a detachment of the most reliable men with Velsers and Hornigold, and bidding the other officers and men to stand where they were until he sent word, Morgan and those with him ran rapidly forward until they came to the ambuscade which young Teach had artfully prepared. He and his had scarcely time to dispose themselves for concealment before a soldier came riding carelessly down the road. Waiting until the man had passed him a short distance and until the other unsuspecting travelers were fairly abreast the liers-in-wait, whom he had charged on no account to move until he gave the word, Morgan stepped out into the open and called. The buccaneers instantly followed him.

As the soldier saw these fierce looking men spring before him out of the darkness, he cried aloud. The next moment he was shot dead by Morgan himself. At the same instant a volley rang out at contact range, and every man in the party fell to the ground. Some were killed, others only wounded; all of them except Alvarado were injured in some way. He struck spurs into his horse when he heard the cry of Fadrique and the shot. The surprised barb plunged forward, was hit by half a dozen bullets, fell to the ground in a heap, and threw his rider over his head. The Spaniard scrambled to his feet, whipped out his sword, lunged forward and drove his blade into the breast of old Velsers. The next instant a dozen weapons flashed over his head. One rang upon his steel casque, another crashed against the polished breastplate that he wore. He cut out again in the darkness, and once more fleshed his weapon.

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Women's screams rose above the tumult. Beating back the swords which menaced him, although he was reeling from the blows which he had received, Alvarado strove to make his way toward Donna Mercedes, when he was seized in the darkness from behind.

"Kill him!" cried a voice in English, which Alvarado and Mercedes both understood perfectly. "He's the only one alive."

"Nay," cried another voice, stronger and sterner, "save him; we'll question him later. Did any escape?"

"Not one."

"Are there any horses alive?"

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"Two or three."

"Bring them hither. Now back to the rest. Then we can show a light and see what we have captured. Teach, lead on. Let no harm come to the women."

"Ay, ay," answered another voice out of the darkness, and a third voice growled out:

"Hadn't we better make sure that none are alive to tell the tale?"

"Of course; a knife for the wounded," answered the stern voice, "and bear a hand."

Greatly surprised and unable to comprehend anything but that his men had been slaughtered and no harm had as yet befallen his charges, Alvarado, whose arms had been bound to his side, found himself dragged along in the wake of his captors, one or two of whom mounted on the unwounded horses, with the two women between them, rode rapidly down the road.

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CHAPTER XV

TELLS HOW MERCEDES DE LARA RETURNED THE UNSOUGHT CARESS OF SIR HENRY MORGAN, AND THE MEANS BY WHICH THE BUCCANEERS SURMOUNTED THE WALLS

One hundred yards or so beyond the place of the ambush the road dropped sharply over the last low cliff to the narrow strand which led to the west wall of La Guayra, distant a half a mile away. They had all been under the deep shadow of the thick trees overhanging the way until this instant, but in the faint light cast by the moon just risen, Alvarado could see that a great body of people were congregated before him on the road. Who they were and what they were he could not surmise. He was not long left in doubt, however, for the same voice whose commanding tones had caused his life to be spared, now called for lights. The demand was obeyed with a promptness that bespoke fear indeed, or discipline of the sternest, and soon the captives found themselves in a circle of lurid light sent forth by a number of blazing torches.

The illumination revealed to Alvarado as villainous and terrible-looking a body of men as he had ever seen. The first glance convinced him that they were not Spanish brigands or robbers. He was too young to have had dealings with the buccaneers of the past generation, but he realized that if any such remained on this side of the earth, they must be like these men who surrounded him. He wasted no time in surmises, however, for after the first swift comprehensive glance his eyes sought Mercedes. She sat her horse free and uninjured apparently, for which he thanked God. She was leaning forward over her saddle and staring in bewilderment and surprise at the scene and confusion before her.

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"Donna Mercedes," cried Alvarado, turning himself about, in spite of his bonds and the restraint his immediate captors endeavored to put upon him, "are you safe—unhurt?"

"Safe," answered the girl, "and thou?"

"Well, but for these bonds."

"God be thanked! Who are these men?"

"I know not, but——"

"Oh, sir," interrupted Señora Agapida, recovering her voice at the sound of the Spanish tongue, "for Christ's sake, what does this mean? Save us!"

"Señora," said that same sharp voice, but this time speaking in the Spanish tongue, as a tall man, hat in hand, urged his horse forward, "fear nothing, you shall be protected. And you, señorita. Do I not have the honor of addressing Donna Mercedes de Lara?"

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"That is my name," answered the girl, haughtily. "Who are you? Why have you shot my people and seized me prisoner?"

"For love of you, Mistress Mercedes."

"Just heaven! Who are you, I say!" cried the girl at this startling answer, turning in surprise and terror to look upon his countenance.

There was something familiar in the man's face that called up a vague recollection which she strove to master.

"Who are you?" she cried again.

"Sir Harry Morgan!" answered the horseman, bowing low over the saddle, "a free sailor at your service, ma'am."

"My God!" cried Alvarado, who had listened attentively, "the buccaneer?"

"The same," answered Morgan turning to him.

"Sir Harry Morgan! Were you not Governor of Jamaica last year?" asked Mercedes in astonishment.

"I had that honor, lady."

"Why are you now in arms against us?"

"A new king, Mistress de Lara, sits the English throne. He likes me not. I and these gallant seamen are going to establish a kingdom in some sweet island in the South Seas, with our good swords. I would fain have a woman to bear me company on the throne. Since I saw you in Jamaica last year, I have designed you for the honor——"

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"Monster!" screamed the girl, appalled by the hideous leer which accompanied his words. "Rather anything——"

"Sir," interrupted Alvarado, "you are an Englishman. Your past rank should warrant you a gentleman, but for this. There is no war between England and Spain. What is the meaning of this outrage? This lady is the daughter of the Viceroy of Venezuela. I am his captain and the commandante of yonder city of La Guayra. You have waylaid us, taken us at a disadvantage. My men are killed. For this assault His Excellency will exact bloody reparation. Meanwhile give order that we be unbound, and let us pass."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the buccaneer. "Think you I fear the Viceroy? Nay, not His Majesty of Spain himself! I came here with set purpose to take La Guayra and then Caracas, and to bear away with me this pretty lady upon whom, I repeat, I design to bestow the honor of my name."

As he spoke he leaned toward Mercedes, threw his arm around her waist, and before she was even aware of her intention, kissed her roughly on the cheek.

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"Lads," he cried, "three cheers for the future Lady Morgan!"

The proud Spanish girl turned white as death under this insult. Her eyes flashed like coals of fire. Morgan was close beside her. She was without weapon save a jeweled whip that hung at her wrist. Before the first note of a cheer could break from the lips of the men she lifted it and struck him violently again and again full in the face.

"Thou devil!" cried the captain in fury, whipping out his sword and menacing her with it.

"Strike!" cried Mercedes bravely, "and let my blood wash out the insult that you have put upon my cheek."

She raised her whip once more, but this time young Teach, coming on the other side, caught her hand, wrested the jeweled toy from her, and broke it in the struggle.

"Thou shalt pay dearly for those stripes, lady!" roared Morgan, swerving closer to her. "And not now in honorable wedlock——"

"I will die first!" returned Mercedes.

Alvarado, meanwhile, had been struggling desperately to free himself. By the exercise of

superhuman strength, just as Morgan again menaced the woman he loved, he succeeded in freeing himself from his loosely-tied bonds. His guards for the moment had their attention distracted from him by the group on horseback. He wrenched a sword from the hand of one, striking him a blow with his naked fist that sent him reeling as he did so, and then flung out his other arm so that the heavy pommel of the sword struck the second guard in the face, and the way was clear for the moment. He sprang forward instantly, seized Morgan's horse, forced him away from Mercedes by a wrench of his powerful arm, and stood at bay in front of the woman he loved. He said no word but stood with his sword up on guard, panting heavily from his fierce exertions.

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"Alvarado, you will be killed!" screamed the girl, seeing the others make for him.

"Here we have it," sneered Morgan. "This is the secret of your refusal. He is your lover."

"Seize him!" cried Teach, raising his sword, as followed by the others he made at Alvarado, who awaited them undaunted.

"Stay!" shouted de Lussan, "there is a better way."

Rudely shoving Señora Agapida aside, he seized Mercedes from behind.

"Do not move, mademoiselle," he said in French, in his excitement, which fortunately she understood.

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"That's well done!" cried Morgan, "Captain Alvarado, if that be your name, throw down your sword if you would save the lady's life."

"Mind me not, Alvarado," cried Mercedes, but Alvarado, perceiving the situation, instantly dropped his weapon.

"Now seize him and bind him again! And you, dogs!" Morgan added, turning to the men who had allowed the prisoner to slip before, "if he escape you again you shall be hanged to the nearest tree!"

"Hadst not better bind the woman, too?" queried the Frenchman gently, still holding her fast in his fierce grasp.

"Ay, the wench as well. Oh, I'll break your spirit, my pretty one," answered Morgan savagely, flipping the young woman's cheek. "Wilt pay me blows for kisses? Scuttle me, you shall crawl at my feet before I've finished with you!"

"Why not kill this caballero out of hand, captain?" asked Hornigold, savage from a slight wound, as he limped up to Morgan.

"No, I have use for him. Are the rest silent?"

"They will tell no tales," laughed L'Ollonois grimly.

"Did none escape back up the road?"

"None, Sir Henry," answered the other. "My men closed in after them and drove them forward. They are all gone."

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"That's well. Now, for La Guayra. What force is there, Señor Capitan?"

Alvarado remained obstinately silent. He did not speak even when Morgan ruthlessly cut him across the cheek with his dagger. He did not utter a sound, although Mercedes groaned in anguish at the sight of his torture.

"You'd best kill him, captain," said L'Ollonois.

"No, I have need for him, I say," answered Morgan, giving over the attempt to make him speak. "Is any one here who has been at La Guayra recently?" he asked of the others.

"I was there last year on a trading ship of France," answered Sawkins.

"What garrison then?"

"About two hundred and fifty."

"Was it well fortified?"

"As of old, sir, by the forts on either side and a rampart along the sea wall."

"Were the forts in good repair?"

"Well kept indeed, but most of the guns bore seaward."

"Have you the ladders ready?" cried Morgan to Braziliano, who had been charged to convey the rude scaling ladders by which they hoped to get over the walls.

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"All ready, captain," answered that worthy.

"Let us go forward then. We'll halt just out of musket-shot and concert our further plans. We have the Governor in our hands, lads. The rest will be easy. There is plenty of plunder in La Guayra, and when we have made it our own we'll over the mountains and into Caracas. Hornigold, you

are lame from a wound, look to the prisoners."

"To La Guayra! To La Guayra!" enthusiastically shouted the men, taking up the line of march.

The rising moon flooding the white strand made the scene as light as day. They kept good watch on the walls of La Guayra, for the sound of the shots in the night air had been heard by some keen-eared sentry, and as a result the garrison had been called to arms. The firing had been too heavy to be accounted for by any ordinary circumstances, and officers and soldiers had been at a loss to understand it. However, to take precautions were wise, and every preparation was made as if against an immediate attack. The drums were beaten; the ramparts were manned; the guns were primed, and such of the townspeople as were not too timid to bear arms were assembled under their militia officers.

The watchers on the west wall of the fort were soon aware of the approach of the buccaneers. Indeed, they made no concealment whatever about their motions. Who they were and what they were the garrison had not discovered and could not imagine. A prompt and well-aimed volley, however, as soon as the buccaneers came within range apprised them that they were dealing with enemies, and determined enemies at that. Under cover of the confusion caused by this unexpected discharge, Morgan deployed his men. [Pg 256]

"Lads," he said, "we'll board yon fort with a rush and a cheer. The ladders will be placed on the walls, and under cover of a heavy fire from our musketry we'll go over them. Use only the cutlass when you gain the parapet and ply like men. Remember what's on the other side!"

"Ay, but who'll plant the ladders?" asked one.

"The priests and women," said Morgan grimly. "I saved them for that."

A roar of laughter and cheers broke from the ruffianly gang as they appreciated the neatness of the old buccaneer's scheme.

"'Tis an old trick," he continued; "we did the same thing thirty years since at Porto Bello. Eh, Hornigold? How's that leg of yours?"

"Stiff and sore."

"Bide here then with the musketeers. Teach, you shall take the walls under the cliff yonder. L'Ollonois, lead your men straight at the fort. De Lussan, let the curtain between be your point. I shall be with the first to get over. Now, charge your pieces all, and Hornigold, after we have started, by slow and careful fire do you keep the Spaniards down until you hear us cheer. After that, hold your fire." [Pg 257]

"But I should like to be in the first rank myself, master," growled the old boatswain.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Morgan, "that's a right spirit, lad, but that cut leg holds you back, for which you have to thank this gentleman," bowing toward Alvarado with a hideous countenance. "You can be of service here. Watch the musketeers. We would have no firing into our backs. Now bring up the women and priests. And, Hornigold, watch Señorita de Lara. See that she does not escape. On your life, man; I'd rather hold her safe," he muttered under his breath, "than take the whole city of Caracas."

With shouts of fiendish glee the buccaneers drove the hapless nuns and priests, who had been dragged along in the rear, to the front. The Spaniards were firing at them now, but with no effect so far. The distance was great and the moonlight made aim uncertain, and every time a head showed itself over the battlement it became a target for the fire of the musketeers, who, by Hornigold's orders, ran forward under the black shadow cast by the high cliff, where they could not be seen, and from this point of concealment, taking deliberate aim, made havoc among the defenders. [Pg 258]

"Now, good fathers and sisters," began Morgan, "you have doubtless been curious to know why you were not put to death. I saved you—not because I loved you, but because I needed you. I had a purpose in view; that purpose is now apparent."

"What would you with us, señor?" asked Sister Maria Christina, the abbess, stepping out in front of her sisters.

"A little service, my sister. Bring up the ladders, men. See, there are seven all told. That will be four ladies apiece to four ladders; and here are seven priests, which allows two to each of the three remaining ladders, with one priest and one sister over for good measure, and to take the place of any that may be struck down."

"And what are we to do with them, señor?" asked Fra Antonio de Las Casas, drawing nearer to the captain.

"You are to carry them to yonder wall and place them against it."

"You do not mean," burst out Alvarado painfully, for he could scarcely speak from his wounded cheek, "to make these holy women bear the brunt of that fire from the fort, and the good priests as well?" [Pg 259]

"Do I value the lives of women and priests, accursed Spaniard, more than our own?" questioned the captain, and the congenial sentiment was received by a yell of approval from the men. "But if

you are tender-hearted, I'll give the defenders a chance. Will you advise them to yield and thus spare these women?"

"I can not do that," answered Alvarado sadly. "'Tis their duty to defend the town. There are twenty women here, there are five hundred there."

"D'ye hear that, mates?" cried Morgan. "Up with the ladders!"

"But what if we refuse?" cried the abbess.

"You shall be given over to the men," answered Morgan, ferociously, "whereas, if you do as I order, you may go free; those who are left alive after the storm. Do ye hear, men? We'll let them go after they have served us," continued the chief turning to his men. "Swear that you will let them go! There are others in La Guayra."

"We swear, we swear!" shouted one after another, lifting their hands and brandishing their weapons.

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"You hear!" cried Morgan. "Pick up the ladders!"

"For God's sake, sir——" began Maria Christina.

"I know no God," interrupted Morgan.

"You had a mother—a wife once—perhaps children, Señor Capitan. Unsay your words! We can not place the ladders which will give you access to yonder helpless town."

"Then to the men you go!" cried Morgan ruthlessly. "Forward here, two or three of you, take this woman! She chooses——"

"Death——" cried the abbess, snatching a dagger from the nearest hand and driving it into her breast, "rather than dishonor!"

She held herself proudly erect for a moment, swayed back and forth, and then fell prostrate upon the sand, the blood staining her white robe about the hilt of the poniard. She writhed and shuddered in agony where she lay, striving to say something. Fra Antonio sprang to her side, and before any one could interfere knelt down.

"I—I—I have sinned," she gasped. "Mercy, mercy!"

"Thou hast done well, I absolve thee!" cried the priest, making the sign of the cross upon her forehead.

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"Death and fury!" shouted Morgan, livid with rage. "Let her die unshriven! Shall I be balked thus?"

He sprang toward the old man stooping over the woman, and struck him across his shaven crown with the blade of his sword. The priest pitched down instantly upon the body of the abbess, a long shudder running through him. Then he lay still.

"Harry Morgan's way!" cried the buccaneer, recovering his blade. "And you?" turning toward the other women. "Have you had lesson enough? Pick up those ladders, or by hell——"

"Mercy, mercy!" screamed the frightened nuns.

"Not another word! Drive them forward, men!"

The buccaneers sprang at the terrified women and priests, some with weapons out, others with leers and outstretched arms. First one and then another gave way. The only leadership among the sisters and priests lay upon the sand there. What could they do? They picked up the ladders and, urged forward by threats and shouts of the buccaneers under cover of a furious discharge from Hornigold's musketeers, they ran to the walls imploring the Spaniards not to fire upon them.

When the Spanish commander perceived who were approaching, with a mistaken impulse of mercy he ordered his men to fire over their heads, and so did little danger to the approaching buccaneers. A few of them fell, but the rest dashed into the smoke. There was no time for another discharge. The ladders were placed against the walls, and priests and nuns were ruthlessly cast aside and trampled down. In a little space the marauders were upon the ramparts fighting like demons. Morgan, covered by Black Dog, with Teach, de Lussan, and L'Ollonois, was in the lead. Truth to tell, the captain was never backward when fighting was going on. The desperate onslaught of their overwhelming numbers, once they had gained a foothold, swept the defenders before them like chaff. Waiting for nothing, they sprang down from the fort and raced madly through the narrow streets of the town. They brushed opposition away as leaves are driven aside by a winter storm. Ere the defenders on the east forts could realize their presence, they were upon them, also.

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In half an hour every man bearing a weapon had been cut down. The town was at the mercy of this horde of human tigers. They broke open wine cellars; they pillaged the provision shops; they tortured without mercy the merchants and inhabitants to force them to discover their treasures, and they insulted and outraged the helpless women. They were completely beyond control now; drunk with slaughter, intoxicated with liquor, mad with lust, they ravaged and plundered. To add to the confusion, fire burst forth here and there, and before the morning dawned half of the city

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was in ashes.

The pale moon looked down upon a scene of horror such as it had never before shone upon, even in the palmyest days of the buccaneers.

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CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH BENJAMIN HORNIGOLD RECOGNIZES A CROSS, AND CAPTAIN ALVARADO FINDS AND LOSES A MOTHER ON THE STRAND

The musketeers under Hornigold, chosen for their mastery with the weapon, had played their parts with cunning skill.

Concealed from observation by the deep shadow of the cliffs, and therefore immune from the enemy's fire, they had made targets of the Spaniards on the walls, and by a close, rapid, and well-directed discharge, had kept down the return of the garrison until the very moment of the assault. Hornigold was able to keep them in hand for a little space after the capture of the town, but the thought of the pleasure being enjoyed by their comrades was too much for them. Anxious to take a hand in the hideous fray, they stole away one by one, slinking under the cliff until they were beyond the reach of the boatswain, then boldly rushing for the town in the open, until the old sailor was left with only a half-dozen of the most dependable surrounding himself and prisoners.

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The rest would not have got away from him so easily had he not been so intensely occupied that at first he had taken little note of what was going on.

Mercedes and Alvarado had only opportunity to exchange a word now and then, for extended conversation was prevented by the guards. Alvarado strove to cheer the woman he loved, and she promised him she would choose instant death rather than dishonor. He could give her little encouragement of rescue, for unless word of their plight were carried to the Viceroy immediately, he would be far on the way to the Orinoco country before any tidings could reach him, and by the time he returned it would be too late.

Again and again Alvarado strove to break his bonds, in impotent and helpless fury, but this time he was securely bound and his captors only laughed at his struggles. In the midst of their grief and despair they both took notice of the poor abbess. Fra Antonio had not moved since Morgan had stricken him down, but there was life still in the woman, for, from where they stood, some distance back, the two lovers each marked her convulsive

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trembling. The sight appealed profoundly to them in spite of their perilous situation.

"The brave sister lives," whispered Mercedes.

"'Tis so," answered Alvarado. "Señor," he called, "the sister yonder is alive. Wilt not allow us to minister to her?"

"Nay," said Hornigold brusquely, "I will go myself. Back, all of ye!" he added. "She may wish to confess to me in default of the worthy father."

He leered hideously as he spoke.

"Coward!" cried Alvarado, but his words affected Hornigold not at all.

Before he could say another word the guards forced him rudely back with the two women. The worthy Señora Agapida by this time was in a state of complete and total collapse, but Mercedes bore herself—her lover marked with pleasure—as proudly and as resolutely as if she still stood within her father's palace surrounded by men who loved her and who would die for her.

Rolling the body of the prostrate old man aside, Hornigold knelt down on the white sand by the form of the sister. The moonlight shone full upon her face, and as he stooped over he scanned it with his one eye. A sudden flash of recognition came to him. With a muttered oath of surprise he looked again.

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"It can't be!" he exclaimed, "and yet——"

After Fra Antonio's brave attempt at absolution, the woman had fainted. Now she opened her eyes, although she was not yet fully conscious.

"Water!" she gasped feebly, and as it chanced the boatswain had a small bottle of the precious fluid hanging from a strap over his shoulder. There was no pity in the heart of the pirate, he would have allowed the woman to die gasping for water without giving her a second thought, but when he recognized her—or thought he did—there instantly sprang into his mind a desire to make sure. If she were the person he thought her she might have information of value.

Unslinging the bottle and pulling out the cork, he placed it to her lips.

"I—die," she murmured in a stronger voice. "A priest."

"There is none here," answered the boatswain. "Fra Antonio—he absolved you."

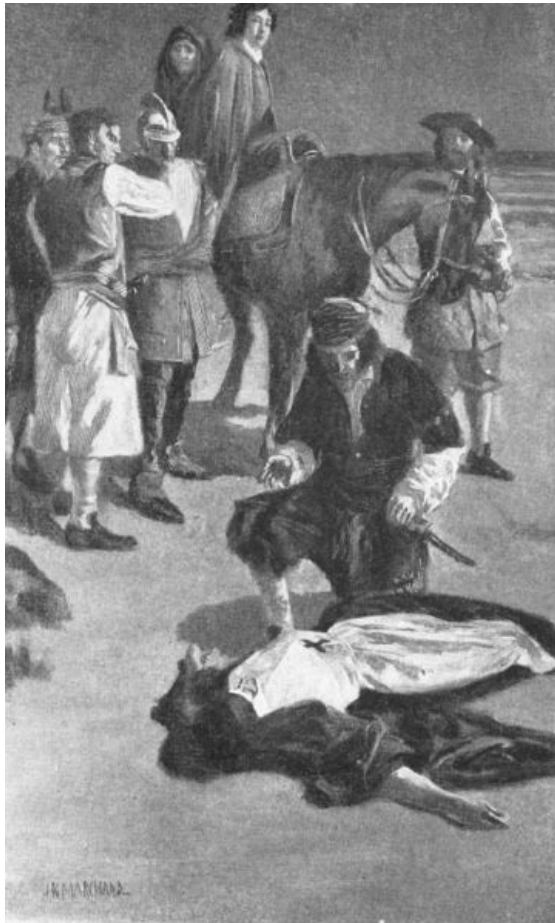
"Where is he?"

"Dead, yonder."

"But I must confess."

"Confess to me," chuckled the old man in ghastly mockery. "Many a woman has done so and——"

"Art in Holy Orders, señor?" muttered the woman.



**The moonlight shone full upon her face,
and as he stooped over he scanned it
with his one eye.**

"Holy enough for you. Say on."

"Fra Antonio, now," she continued, vacantly lapsing into semi-delirium, "he married us—'twas a secret—his rank was so great. He was rich, I poor—humble. The marriage lines—in the cross. There was a—What's that? A shot? The buccaneers. They are coming! Go not, Francisco!"

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Hornigold, bending an attentive ear to these broken sentences lost not a word.

"Go not," she whispered, striving to lift an arm, "they will kill thee! Thou shalt not leave me alone, my Francisco—The boy—in Panama——"

It was evident to the sailor that the poor woman's mind had gone back to the dreadful days of the sack of Panama. He was right then, it was she.

"The boy—save him, save him!" she cried suddenly with astonishing vigor. The sound of her own voice seemed to recall her to herself. She stopped, her eyes lost their wild glare and fixed themselves upon the man above her, his own face in the shadow as hers was in the light.

"Is it Panama?" she asked. "Those screams—the shots—" She turned her head toward the city. "The flames—is it Panama?"

"Nay," answered the one-eyed fiercely. "'Tis twenty-five years since then, and more. Yonder city is La Guayra. This is the coast of Venezuela."

"Oh—the doomed town—I remember—now—I stabbed myself rather than—place the ladders. Who art thou, señor?"

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"Benjamin Hornigold!" cried the man fiercely, bending his face to hers.

For a second the woman stared at him. Then, recognizing him, she screamed horribly, raising

herself upon her arm.

"Hornigold!" she cried. "What have you done with the child?"

"I left him at Cuchillo, outside the walls," answered the man.

"And the cross?"

"On his breast. The Captain——"

"The marriage lines were there. You betrayed me. May God's curse—nay, I die. For Christ's sake—I forgive—Francisco, Francisco."

She fell back gasping on the sand. He tore the enclosing coif from her face. In a vain effort to hold back death's hand for another second, Hornigold snatched a spirit flask from his belt and strove to force a drop between her lips. It was too late. She was gone. He knew the signs too well. He laid her back on the sand, exclaiming:

"Curse her! Why couldn't she have lived a moment longer? The Captain's brat—and she might have told me. Bring up the prisoners!" he cried to the guards, who had moved them out of earshot of this strange conversation. [Pg 272]

"The cross," he muttered, "the marriage lines therein. The only clew. And yet she cried 'Francisco.' That was the name. Who is he? If I could find that cross. I'd know it among a thousand. Hither," he called to the prisoners slowly approaching.

"The good sister?" queried Alvarado.

"Dead."

As the young soldier, with an ejaculation of pity, bent forward in the moonlight to look upon the face of the dead woman, from his torn doublet a silver crucifix suddenly swung before the eyes of the old buccaneer.

"By heaven!" he cried. "'Tis the cross."

He stepped nearer to Alvarado, seized the carven crucifix, and lifted it to the light.

"I could swear it was the same," he muttered. "Señor, your name and rank?"

"I can not conceive that either concerns a bloodthirsty ruffian like——"

"Stop! Perhaps there is more in this than thou thinkest," said Mercedes. "Tell him, Alvarado. It can do no harm. Oh, señor, have pity on us! Unbind me," she added, "I give you my word. I wish but to pay my respect to the woman yonder." [Pg 273]

"She gives good counsel, soldier," answered the boatswain. "Cut her lashing," he said to the sailor who guarded them.

As the buccaneer did so, Mercedes sank on her knees by the side of the dead woman.

"Now, sir, your name?" asked Hornigold again.

"Alvarado."

"Where got you that name?"

"It was given me by His Excellency, the Viceroy."

"And wherefore?"

There was something so tremendous in Hornigold's interest that in spite of himself the young man felt compelled to answer.

"It was his pleasure."

"Had you not a name of your own?"

"None that I know of."

"What mean you?"

"I was found, a baby, outside the walls of Panama in a little village. The Viceroy adopted me and brought me up. That is all."

"When was this?" asked Hornigold.

"After the sack of Panama. And the name of the village was——"

"Cuchillo——" interrupted Hornigold triumphantly.

"My God, señor, how know you that?" [Pg 274]

"I was there."

"You were there?" cried the young man.

"Ay."

"For love of heaven, can you tell me who I am, what I am?"

"In good time, young sir, and for a price. At present I know but one thing."

"That is——"

"There lies your mother," answered the buccaneer slowly, pointing to the white figure on the sand.

"My mother! Madre de Dios!" cried Alvarado, stepping forward and looking down upon the upturned face with its closely cut white hair, showing beautiful in the moonlight. "God rest her soul, she hath a lovely face and died in defence of her honor like the gentlewoman she should be. My mother—how know you this?"

"In the sack of Panama a woman gave me a male child, and for money I agreed to take it and leave it in a safe and secluded spot outside the city walls. I carried it at the hazard of my life as far as Cuchillo and there left it."

"But how know you that the child you left is I?"

"Around the baby's neck the mother, ere she gave him to me, placed this curious cross you wear. 'Tis of such cunning workmanship that there is naught like it under the sun that ever I have seen. I knew it even in the faint light when my eyes fell upon it. I left the child with a peasant woman to take him where I had been directed. I believed him safe. On leaving Panama that village lay in our backward path. We burned it down. I saw the baby again. Because I had been well paid I saved him from instant death at the hands of the buccaneers, who would have tossed him in the air on the point of their spears. I shoved the crucifix, which would have tempted them because it was silver, underneath the dress and left the child. He was alive when we departed."

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"And the day after," cried Alvarado, "de Lara's troops came through that village and found me still wearing that cross. My mother! Loving God, can it be? But my father——"

"What shall I have if I tell you?"

"Riches, wealth, all—Set us free and——"

"Not now. I can not now. Wait."

"At least, Donna Mercedes."

"Man, 'twould be my life that would pay; but I'll keep careful watch over her. I have yet some influence with the Captain. To-morrow I'll find a way to free you—you must do the rest."

"Mercedes," said Alvarado, "heardst thou all?"

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"But little," answered the girl.

"That lady—is believed to have been my mother!"

"Gentle or simple," said the girl, "she died in defence of her honor, like the noblest, the best. This for thee, good sister," she whispered, bending down and kissing the pale forehead. "And may I do the like when my time comes. Thou shouldst be proud of her, my Alvarado," she said, looking up at him. "See!" she cried suddenly as the resemblance, which was indeed strong between them, struck her. "Thou hast her face. Her white hair was once golden like thine. He tells the truth. Oh, sir, for Christ's sake, have pity upon us!"

A messenger came staggering toward them across the woods.

"Master Hornigold," he cried.

"Ay, ay."

"We've taken the town. The Captain wants you and your prisoners. You'll find him in the guard room. Oh, ho, there's merry times to-night in La Guayra! All hell's let loose, and we are devils." He laughed boisterously and drunkenly as he spoke and lurched backward over the sands.

"We must be gone," said Hornigold. "Rise, mistress. Come, sir."

"But this lady," urged Alvarado—his lips could scarcely form the unfamiliar word "mother"—"and the good priest? You will not leave them here?"

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"The rising tide will bear them out to sea."

"A moment—by your leave," said Alvarado, stepping toward the dead. Assisted by Mercedes, for he was still bound, he stooped down and touched his lips to those of the dead woman, whispering a prayer as he did so. Rising to his feet he cried:

"But my father—who is he—who was he?"

"We shall find that out."

"But his name?"

"I'm not sure, I can not tell now," answered Hornigold evasively; "but with this clew the rest should be easy. Trust me, and when we can discuss this matter undisturbed——"

"But I would know now!"

"You forget, young sir, that you are a prisoner, and must suit your will to my pleasure. Forward!"

But the soul of the old buccaneer was filled with fierce joy. He thought he knew the secret of the crucifix now. The Spanish captain's mother lay dead upon the sands, but his father lived. He was sure of it. He would free Alvarado and bring him down upon Morgan. He chuckled with fiendish delight as he limped along. He had his revenge now; it lay in the hollow of his hand, and 'twas a rare one indeed. Mercedes being bound again, the little party marched across the beach and the bodies of the priest and the nun were left alone while the night tide came rippling up the strand.

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Scarcely had the party disappeared within the gate of the fort when the priest slowly and painfully lifted himself on his hands and crawled toward the woman. While the buccaneer had talked with the abbess he had returned to consciousness and had listened. Bit by bit he gathered the details of her story, and in truth he knew it of old. By turning his head he had seen the crucifix on the young man's breast and he also had recognized it. He lay still and silent, however, feigning death, for to have discovered himself would have resulted in his instant despatch. When they had gone he painfully crawled over to the body of the poor nun.

"Isabella," he murmured, giving her her birth name, "thou didst suffer. Thou tookest thine own life, but the loving God will forgive thee. I am glad that I had strength and courage to absolve thee before I fell. And I did not know thee. 'Tis so many years since. Thy son, that brave young captain—I will see thee righted. I wonder——"

He moved nearer to her, scrutinizing her carefully, and then, with an apology even to the dead, the old man opened the front of her gown.

"Ay, ay, I thought so," he said, as his eye caught a glimpse of a gold chain against her white neck. Gently he lifted it, unclasped it, drew it forth. There was a locket upon it. Jewels sparkled upon its surface. She had worn it all these years.

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"*O, vanitas vanitatum!*" murmured the priest, yet compassionately. "What is it that passes the love of woman?"

He slipped it quietly within the breast of his habit and then fell prostrate on the sand, faint from pain and loss of blood. Long the two figures lay there in the moonlight while the rising tide lipped the shining sands. The cool water at last restored consciousness to one of the still forms, but though they laved the beautiful face of the other with tender caresses they could not call back the troubled life that had passed into peaceful eternity. Painfully the old priest raised himself upon his hands and looked about him.

"O God!" he murmured, "give me strength to live until I can tell the story. Sister Maria Christina—Isabella that was—thou wert brave and thou wert beautiful; thou hast served our Holy Church long and well. If I could only lay thee in some consecrated ground—but soul like to thine makes holy e'en the sea which shall bear thee away. Shrive thou wert, buried thou shalt be."

The man struggled to his knees, clasped his hands before him, and began the burial service of his ancient Church.

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"We therefore commit her body into the great deep," he said, "looking for the general resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come——"

The water was washing around him ere he finished his mournful task, and with one long look of benison and farewell he rose to his feet and staggered along the road down the beach. Slowly he went, but presently he reached the turn where began the ascent of the mountain. Before he proceeded he halted and looked long toward the flaming, shrieking, ruined town. The flooding tide was in now and the breakers were beating and thundering far across the sands. The body of the abbess was gone.

The old man drew himself up, lifted his trembling hands and prayed; he prayed again for the soul of the woman; he prayed for the young man, that he might learn the truth; he prayed for the beautiful damsel who loved him; he prayed for the people, the hapless people of the doomed town, the helpless, outraged women, the bereft mothers, the tortured men, the murdered children, and as he prayed he called down the curse of God upon those who had wrought such ruin.

"Slay them, O God! Strike and spare not! Cut them off root and branch who have despoiled thy people Israel. They have taken the sword and may they perish by it as was promised of old!"

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A gray, grim, gaunt figure, bloodstained, pale, he stood there in that ghastly light, invoking the judgment of God upon Morgan and his men ere he turned away and was lost in the darkness of the mountain.

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CHAPTER XVII

WHICH DESCRIBES AN AUDIENCE WITH SIR HENRY MORGAN AND THE TREACHERY BY WHICH CAPTAIN ALVARADO IS BENEFITED



he clock on the wall was striking eleven as Hornigold forced his prisoners into the guardroom of the first fort that had been captured, which, as it was the larger of the two, Morgan had selected as his head quarters. Mercedes' soul had turned to stone at the sights and sounds which met her as she passed through the town where the hellish revelry was now in full blast. The things she witnessed and heard were enough to appall the stoutest heart that ever beat within the rudest breast. She forgot her own danger in her sympathy for the suffering inhabitants of the devoted town. Ghastly pale and sick with horror, she tottered and staggered as she entered the room. As for the Señora Agapida, she had collapsed long since, and for the last one hundred yards of the journey had been dragged helplessly along by two of her captors, who threw her in a senseless heap on the stone flagging of the great vaulted chamber.

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The agony and suffering, the torture and death, the shame and dishonor of his people affected Alvarado differently. His soul flamed within his breast with pity for the one, rage for the other. He lusted and thirsted to break away and single-handed rush upon the human wolves and tigers, who were despoiling women, torturing men, murdering children, as if they had been devils. The desire mastered him, and he writhed and struggled in his bonds,

but unavailingly.

It was a haggard, distracted pair, therefore, which was brought before the chief buccaneer. Morgan sat at the head of the guardroom, on a platform, a table before him strewn with reckless prodigality with vessels of gold and silver stolen from altar and sideboard indifferently, some piled high with food, others brimming with a variety of liquors, from the rich old wines of Xeres to the fiery native rum. On one side of the captain was a woman. Pale as a ghost, the young and beautiful widow of a slaughtered officer, in her disordered array she shrank terrified beneath his hand. L'Ollonois, Teach and de Lussan were also in the room. By each one cowered another woman prisoner. Teach was roaring out a song, that song of London town, with its rollicking chorus:

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"Though life now is pleasant and sweet to the sense,
We'll be damnably moldy a hundred years hence."

The room was full of plunder of one sort and another, and the buccaneers were being served by frightened negro slaves, their footsteps quickened and their obedience enforced by the sight of a dead black in one corner, whom de Lussan had knifed a short time since because he had been slow in coming to his call. The smell of spilled liquor, of burnt powder, and of blood, indescribable and sickening, hung in the close, hot air. Lamps and candles were flaring and spluttering in the room but the greater illumination came through the open casements from the roaring fires of burning houses outside. The temptation to join in the sack of the town had been too much for Hornigold's remaining men, consequently he and those conveying Señora Agapida alone attended the prisoners. These last, after throwing the duenna recklessly upon the floor, hurried out after the rest, leaving the officers and women alone.

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"Silence!" roared Morgan, as his eye fell upon the group entering the lower end of the great hall. "Pipe down, thou bellowing bull!" he shouted, throwing a silver cup that Cellini might have chased, at the head of the half drunken Teach. "Who's there? Scuttle me, 'tis our spitfire and the gallant captain, with that worthy seaman Hornigold! Advance, friends. Thou art welcome to our cheer. Drive them forward, Hornigold," he cried, as he saw Mercedes and Alvarado made no attempt to move.

"Advance quickly," whispered Hornigold to Alvarado; "to cross him now were death."

Seizing them with a great show of force he shoved them down the hall to the foot of the platform, in front of the revellers.

"I welcome thee to our court, fair lady, and you, brave sir. What say ye, gentles all? Rum for the noble captain, here, and wine for the lady," called out Morgan, bowing over the table in malicious mockery.

"I drink with no murderer," said Alvarado firmly, thrusting the negro, who proffered him a glass, violently aside with his shoulder, causing him to topple over, drenching himself with the liquor.

"Ha! Is it so?" laughed Morgan in a terrible manner. "Hark'ee, my young cock, thou shalt crave and beg and pray for another drink at my hand presently—and get it not. But there is another cup thou shalt drink, ay, and that to the dregs. Back, you! I would speak with the lady. Well, Donna Mercedes," he continued, "art still in that prideful mood?"

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Silence. The girl stood erect, disdainfully looking him full in the face.

"I shall break thee yet, proud wench!" he shouted.

"Perhaps the demoiselle is jealous of thy present companion, Sir Captain," sneered de Lussan smoothly in his courtliest manner.

"Scuttle me! That's well thought on," laughed Morgan. "And I'll add fuel to the fire."

As he spoke he clasped the terrified woman on his right around the waist, and though she struggled and drew away from him in horror and disgust, he kissed her full upon the lips. The woman shuddered loathingly when he released her, put her face down in her hands and sobbed low and bitterly.

"What sayest thou to that, sweet Mercedes?"

"I say may God have mercy on the soul of yon poor woman," answered Mercedes disdainfully.

"Best pray for thine own soul, madam," he roared. "Come hither! What, you move not? Black Dog, Black Dog, I say!"

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The huge maroon lurched from behind his master's chair, where he had lain half-drunken.

"Fetch me that woman!"

Mercedes was bound and could not at first release her hands, but as the maroon shambled toward her she sprang back struggling.

"Alvarado, Alvarado!" she screamed. "Help me, save me!"

Like a maddened bull, though his hands were bound also, Alvarado threw himself upon the negro. The force with which he struck him hurled him backward and the two fell to the floor, the maroon beneath. His head struck a corner of the step with a force that would have killed a white man. In an instant, however, the unbound negro was on his feet. He whipped out his dagger and would have plunged it into the breast of the prostrate Spaniard had not Mercedes, lightly bound, for being a woman they thought it not necessary to be unusually severe in her lashings, wrenched free her hands and caught the half-breed's upraised arm.

"Mercy!" she screamed, while struggling to divert the blow, looking toward Morgan.

"Hold your hand, Black Dog," answered that worthy. "Leave the man and come hither. This is thy first appeal, lady. You know my power at last, eh? Down on your knees and beg for his life!"

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Instantly Mercedes sank to her knees and stretched out her hands, a piteous, appealing, lovely figure.

"Spare him, spare him!" she cried.

"What would you do for him?"

"My life for his," she answered bravely.

"Nay, Mercedes," interposed Alvarado, "let him work his will on me."

"There are worse places, thou seest, lady, than by my side," sneered Morgan. "By heaven, 'twas a pretty play, was it not, mates? I spare him, but remember, 'tis for you. Harry Morgan's way. Now reward me. Hither, I say! Go, you woman!" he struck the woman he had kissed a fierce blow with his naked fist—"Away from me! Your place is needed for your betters. Here lady——"

"Captain Morgan," cried Hornigold, suddenly interrupting him. "I bethink me you should send men to seize the mountain pass that leads to Caracas at once, else we may have troops upon us in the morning."

It was a bold diversion and yet it succeeded. There could be no safe feasting in La Guayra with that open road. Morgan had overlooked it, but the boatswain's words recalled it to him; for the moment he forgot the prisoners and the women. Safety was a paramount consideration.

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"I forgot it," he answered. "Curse me, how can I? The villains are too drunk with rum and blood and fury to be despatched."

"A force must be assembled at once," urged Hornigold, insistently, "lest some have escaped who would bring word to the Viceroy. He would be upon us in a day with an army too great for resistance. If you intend not to rot here in La Guayra, or be caught in a death trap, we must be up to the mountain top beforehand. Once they seize the pass, we are helpless."

"That's well said, Hornigold," cried Morgan, who was not so drunk that he could not realize the practical value of Hornigold's suggestion and the great danger of disregarding his advice. "The pass must be seized at all hazard. With that in our possession we may bide our time. I thought to wait until to-morrow, but you're right. We've feasted and drunk enough for the night. To-morrow Donna de Lara! Guards for the pass now—But how to get them?"

He rose to his feet as he spoke and came down the hall.

"Teach and L'Ollinois, follow me!" he cried. "Gather up fifty of the soberest men and lead them up the mountain road till you reach the pass, and then hold it till I come. Nay, no hesitation," he roared. "Canst not see the necessity? Unless we are masters of that pass we are caught like rats in a trap here in La Guayra. To-morrow or the next day we shall march up toward Caracas. Your share of the treasure and your women shall be held safe. You shall have first consideration on the other side of the mountains. Nay, I will have it so!" He stamped his foot in furious rage. "We've all had too much drink already," he continued, "now we must make things secure. Hornigold, take

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charge of this fort. I leave the prisoners with you. Guard them well. Treat the lady well also. Do what you like with the other, only keep him alive. One of you send Braziliano to me. He shall have the other fort. And you and I, Monsieur de Lussan, will take account of the men here in the town and bring them into such order as we can."

Although Teach and L'Ollonois had no mind to leave the pleasures open to them in La Guayra, yet they were both men of intelligence and could easily see the absolute necessity for the precaution suggested by Hornigold and accepted by their captain. If they held the passage over the mountains, and fifty men could hold it against a thousand, no Spaniard could come at them. So the little group, leaving the wretched women, the two prisoners, and Hornigold, sallied out into the infernal night. It was a difficult thing for them to find a sufficient number of sober pirates, but by persuading, threatening, and compelling they at last gathered a force of the least drunken knaves, with which they set forth on the road.

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The fires which had been wantonly kindled in different places by the buccaneers were making such headway that Morgan instantly saw that especial efforts would be needed to prevent the complete destruction of the town. He wanted La Guayra for his base of supplies for the present, and with tremendous energy, seconded by de Lussan and some of the soberer men, he routed out the buccaneers and set them to work.

"You have saved me for the moment," said Mercedes, gratefully, turning to Hornigold as he led her away from the hall.

"'Twas not for care of you," hissed out the old man, malevolently, "but that I'd fain balk him in every desire he cherishes, even of possessing you."

"Whatever it was, I am thankful, señor. You have my prayers——"

"Prayers," laughed the old sailor, "it hath been sixty years since I heard those canting Puritans, my mother and father, pray. I want no prayers. But come, I must put you in ward. There should be strong-rooms in this castle."

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He summoned a slave and found what he wanted. Mercedes, and Señora Agapida, who was fetched by other slaves, were locked in one room, Alvarado was thrust into another. As soon as he could do so, after making some provision for the comfort of the woman, Hornigold came down to him.

"Señor," he said, "the band is drunk and helpless. One hundred resolute men could master them. Morgan means to march to Caracas to-morrow. He can not get his men in shape to do so as long as liquor flows in La Guayra. If I set you free, what can you do?"

"There is a way over the mountains," answered Alvarado. "A secret way, known only to the Indians."

"Know you this path?"

"It has been pointed out to me."

"Is it a practicable way?"

"It has been abandoned for fifty years, but I could follow it to Caracas."

"And once there, what then?"

"There, if the Viceroy be not gone, and I do not believe he has yet departed, are one thousand soldiers to re-take the city."

"And if they be gone?"

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"I'll raise the citizens, the household guards, the savages, and the slaves!"

"Can you do it?"

"Free me and see," answered Alvarado, with such resolution that he convinced the sailor. "The men of Caracas love the daughter of the Viceroy. They are not inexperienced in arms. I will lead them. The advantage of numbers will be with us. If you free me, I take it we will have a friend within the walls. Success is certain. We have too much to revenge," he added, his face flushing with rage at the thought of it all.

"That's well," answered Hornigold. "If I free you what reward shall I have?"

"I will cover you with treasure."

"And guarantee my life and liberty?"

"They shall be held inviolate."

"We captured the Porto Bello plate ship, and were wrecked two days ago a league or so to the westward——"

"I saw the ship the day of the storm, but marked it not," interrupted the officer.

"Ay. We buried the treasure. Shall I have my share?"

"All that thou canst take, if the honor of the lady be preserved. I answer for the Viceroy."

"Will you swear it?"

"Yes."

"By your mother's cross?"

"By my mother's cross, I swear. I will keep my faith with you, so help me God!"

"I believe in no God, but you do, and that suffices. You shall go," cried the buccaneer, all his objections satisfied. "But as you love the woman, lose no time. I'll be at the west gate under the rocks at ten o'clock to-morrow night. You know it?"

"Yes, go on."

"I'll open the gate for you and leave the rest to you. You must be there with your force. Now, go."

"I shall be there. But I can not leave without Donna Mercedes."

"And you can't go with her. Think! Could she make her way over the mountains?"

"No, no, but——"

"I'll watch over her with my life," urged the One-Eyed. "My share of the treasure depends upon her safety, you said."

"But Morgan——"

"I hate him with a hatred greater than thine."

"He is thy captain."

"He betrayed me, and I swore to take such vengeance as was never heard before, to make him suffer such torments by my hand as were never felt outside of hell."

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"You would betray him?"

"It was for that I came with him! for that I live. He craves and covets the Donna Mercedes. He shall not have her. Trust me to interpose at the last moment."

"Is this true? Can I believe you?"

"Else why should I jeopard my life by freeing you? I hate him, I tell you. Remember! The west gate! There are not three hundred men here. The best fifty have gone with Teach and L'Ollonais, the rest are drunken and cowards. Here are weapons. Wrap yourself in this cloak, and come. Say no word to any one on the way. By Satan, as you love the wench, lose no time!"

As he spoke, the old man cut the bonds of Alvarado, belted upon him dagger and sword, thrust a charged pistol in his hand, covered his head with a steel cap, and threw a long cloak around him. The two then went forth into the night. Avoiding the notice of others, they hastened along the deserted parapet, for there were none to keep watch or guard, until they came to one of the ladders by which the buccaneers had entered the town. Down it Alvarado, first swearing again on the cross, on his honor, to respect his agreement with Hornigold and again receiving the man's assurance, dropped hastily to the ground.

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There was no one to look, and he dashed recklessly across the narrow strip of sand to the shadow of the cliffs, along which he ran until he came opposite the place of his mother's death. The white water was rolling and crashing on the beach, and the body was gone. With a hasty petition for the repose of her soul, he ran on until he reached the turn of the road. There, like the priest, he made another prayer, and it was a prayer not different from that which had been voiced so short a time before.

But his petitions were soon over. It was a time for work, not prayer. No moment could be lost. He girded up his loins and turned away on the run. Unlike the priest, however, he did not pursue the mountain road, but, after going a short distance, he left the way and plunged to the right through the trees directly up the side of the hill.

His face was cut and slashed by Morgan's dagger; his soul had been racked and torn by the scenes he had gone through; the plight of Mercedes stirred him to the very depths; his heart yearned over the slaughtered garrison, the ruined town, but with a strength superhuman he plunged at the hill, in spite of the forest, groping about in the darkness with frantic energy until he found the traces of a slender, rocky path which led over the mountains.


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BOOK V

HOW THE SPANIARDS RE-TOOK LA GUAYRA AND HOW CAPTAIN ALVARADO FOUND A NAME AND SOMETHING DEARER STILL IN THE CITY

DISCLOSES THE WAY IN WHICH MERCEDES DE LARA FOUGHT WITH WOMAN'S CUNNING AGAINST CAPTAIN HENRY MORGAN

he day after the sack of the town had been a busy one for the buccaneers. First of all, Morgan had striven, and with some success, to restore some sort of order within the walls. By the aid of his officers and some of the soberest men he had confiscated all of the liquor that he could come at, and had stored it under a strong guard in the west fort, which he selected as his headquarters. The Governor's palace on the hill above was a more fitting and luxurious residence and it had been promptly seized, the few defenders having fled, in the morning; but for the present Morgan deemed it best to remain in the city and in close touch with his men.

The Spanish soldiery had been cut down to a man the night before, and the majority of the hapless citizens had been killed, wounded or tortured. The unfortunates who were yet alive were driven into the church of San Lorenzo, where they were kept without food, water, or attention.

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There were some children, also, who had survived the night, for the buccaneers, frenzied with slaughter and inflamed with rum, had tossed many of them on their sword-points when they came across them in the streets. By Morgan's orders the living were collected in the store-house and barracks of the Guinea Trading Company, a corporation which supplied slaves to the South American countries, and which had branches in every city on the Caribbean. He did order food and water to be given these helpless unfortunates, so their condition was not quite so deplorable as that of the rest. It was bad enough, however, and the old barracks which had echoed with the sound of many a bitter cry from the forlorn lips of wretched slaves, now resounded with the wailing of these terrified little ones.

The condition of the women of the city was beyond description. They, too, were herded together in another building, an ancient convent, but were plentifully supplied with every necessary they could ask for. Death, in lieu of the fate that had come upon them, would have been welcomed by many a high-born dame and her humbler sister as well, but they were all carefully searched and deprived of everything that might serve as a weapon. They were crowded together indiscriminately, high and low, rich and poor, black or white or red, in all states of disorder and disarray, just as they had been seized the night before, some of them having been dragged from their very beds by the brutal ruffians.

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Some of the women, maddened to frenzy by the treatment they had received, screamed and raved; but most of them were filled with still misery, overwhelmed by silent despair—waiting hopelessly for they knew not what bitter, degrading end. One night had changed them from happy wives, honored mothers, light-hearted, innocent girls, to wrecks of womanhood. The light of life was dead in them. They were dumb and unprotesting. The worst had come upon them; there was nothing of sorrow and shame they had not tasted. What mattered anything else? Their husbands, fathers, children, lovers had gone. Homes were broken up; their property was wasted, and not even honor was left. They prayed to die. It was all that was left to them.

The gates of the town and forts were closed and some slight attempt was made to institute a patrol of the walls, although the guard that was kept was negligent to the point of contempt. As no enemy was apprehended Morgan did not rigorously insist upon strict watch. Many of the buccaneers were still sodden with liquor and could be of no service until they were sobered. They were dragged to the barracks, drenched with water, and left to recover as best they could.

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Fortune favored them in one other matter, too, in that late in the afternoon a handsome frigate bringing despatches from Carthage, ran in and anchored in the roadstead. Her officers at once came ashore to pay their respects to the Commandante of the port and forward their papers to the Viceroy. Before they suspected anything, they were seized and ruthlessly murdered. To take possession of the frigate thereafter was a work of no special difficulty. The crew were disposed of as their officers had been, and the buccaneers rejoiced greatly at the good luck that had brought them so fine a ship. On the next morning Morgan intended to march toward Caracas, whence, after plundering that town and exacting a huge ransom for the lives of those he spared, he would lead his band back to La Guayra, embark on the frigate, and then bear away for the Isthmus.

During the day, Hornigold, whose wound incapacitated him from active movement, remained in command of the fort with special instructions to look after Mercedes. By Morgan's orders she and her companion were removed to the best room in the fort and luxuriously provided for. He had not discovered the escape of Alvarado, partly because he took no manner of interest in that young man and only kept him alive to influence the girl, and partly because Hornigold had assured him that the prisoner was taking his confinement very hardly, that he was mad with anger, in a raging fever of disappointment and anxiety, and was constantly begging to see the captain. The boatswain cunningly suggested that it would be just as well to let Alvarado remain in solitude, without food or water until the next day, by which time, the boatswain argued, he would be reduced to a proper condition of humility and servitude. Morgan found this advice good. It was quite in consonance with his desires and his practices. He would have killed Alvarado out of hand had he not considered him the most favorable card with which to play the game he was waging with Mercedes for her consent to marry him.

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So far as he was capable of a genuine affection, he loved the proud Spanish maiden. He would fain persuade her willingly to come to his arms rather than enforce her consent or overcome her scruples by brute strength. There would be something of a triumph in winning her, and this vain,

bloodstained old brute fancied that he had sufficient attractiveness for the opposite sex to render him invincible if he set about his wooing in the right way. He thought he knew the way, too. At any rate he was disposed to try it. Here again Hornigold, upon whom in the absence of Teach he depended more and more, and in whom he confided as of old, advised him.

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"I know women," said that worthy, and indeed no man had more knowledge of the class which stood for women in his mind than he, "and all you want is to give her time. Wait until she knows what's happened to the rest of them, and sees only you have power to protect her, and she will come to heel right enough. Besides, you haven't given her half a chance. She's only seen you weapon in hand. She doesn't know what a man you are, Captain. Sink me, if I'd your looks instead of this old, scarred, one-eyed face, there'd be no man I'd give way to and no woman I'd not win! Steer her along gently with an easy helm. Don't jam her up into the wind all of a sudden. Women have to be coaxed. Leave the girl alone a watch. Don't go near her; let her think what she pleases. Don't let anybody go near her unless it's me, and she won't get anything out of me, you can depend upon that! She'll be so anxious to talk to you in the morning that you can make her do anything. Then if you can starve that Spanish dog and break his spirit, so that she'll see him crawling at your feet, she'll sicken of him and turn to a man."

"Scuttle me," laughed Morgan, "your advice is good! I didn't know you knew so much about the sex."

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"I've mixed up considerable with them in sixty years, Captain," leered the old man. "What I don't know about them ain't worth knowing."

"It seems so. Well, I'll stay away from her till the morning. I shall be busy anyway trying to straighten out these drunken sots, and do you put the screws on that captain and leave the lady alone—but see that she lacks nothing."

"Ay, ay, trust me for them both."

Hornigold found means during the day—and it was a matter of no little difficulty to elude the guards he himself had placed there—to inform Mercedes of the escape of Alvarado, and to advise her that he expected the return of that young man with the troops of the Viceroy at ten o'clock that night. He bade her be of good cheer, that he did not think it likely that Morgan would think of calling upon her or of sending for her until morning, when it would be too late. He promised that he would watch over her and do what he could to protect her; that he would never leave the fort except for a few moments before ten that night, when he went to admit Alvarado. What was better earnest of his purpose was that he furnished her with a keen dagger, small enough to conceal in the bosom of her dress, and advised her if worst came to worst, and there was no other way, to use it. He impressed on her that on no account was she to allow Morgan to get the slightest inkling of his communication to her, for if the chief buccaneer found this out Hornigold's life would not be worth a moment's thought, and Alvarado would be balked in his plans of rescue.

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Mercedes most thankfully received the weapon and promised to respect the confidence. She was grateful beyond measure, and he found it necessary harshly to admonish her that he only assisted her because he had promised Alvarado that she should receive no harm, and that his own safety depended upon hers. He did not say so, but under other circumstances he would have as ruthlessly appropriated her for himself as Morgan intended to do, and without the shadow of a scruple.

As far as creature comforts were concerned the two women fared well. Indeed, they were sumptuously, lavishly, prodigally provided for. Señora Agapida was still in a state of complete prostration. She lay helpless on a couch in the apartment and ministering to her distracted the poor girl's mind, yet such a day as Mercedes de Lara passed she prayed she might never again experience. The town was filled with the shouts and cries of the buccaneers wandering to and fro, singing drunken choruses, now and again routing out hidden fugitives from places of fancied security and torturing them with ready ingenuity whenever they were taken. The confusion was increased and the noise diversified by the shrieks and groans of these miserable wretches. Sometimes the voices that came through the high windows were those of women, and the sound of their screams made the heart of the brave girl sink like lead in her breast.

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For the rest, she did not understand Hornigold's position. She did not know whether to believe him or not, but of one thing was she certain. Whereas she had been defenceless now she had a weapon, and she could use it if necessary. With that in hand she was mistress at least of her own fate.

As evening drew on, every thing having been attended to, Morgan began to tire of his isolation, and time hung heavy on his hands. He was weary of the women whom he had hitherto consorted with; the other officers, between whom and himself there was no sort of friendship, were busy with their own nefarious wickednesses in the different parts of the fort or town, and he sat a long time alone in the guardroom, drinking, Black Dog, as usual, pouring at his side. The liquor inflamed his imagination and he craved companionship. Summoning Hornigold at last, he bade him bring Donna Mercedes before him. The old man attempted to expostulate, but Morgan's mood had changed and he brooked no hesitation in obeying any order given by him. There was nothing for the boatswain to do but to comply.

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Once more Mercedes, therefore, found herself in the guardroom of the fort in the presence of the man she loathed and feared above all others in creation. Her situation, however, was vastly different from what it had been. On the first occasion there had appeared no hope. Now Alvarado

was free and she had a weapon. She glanced at the clock, a recent importation from Spain hanging upon the wall, as she entered, and saw that it was half-after nine. Ten was the hour Hornigold had appointed to meet Alvarado at the gate. She hoped that he would be early rather than late; and, if she could withstand the buccaneer by persuasion, seeming compliance, or by force, for a short space, all would be well. For she never doubted that her lover would come for her. Even if he had to come single-handed and alone to fight for her, she knew he would be there. Therefore, with every nerve strained almost to the breaking point to ward off his advances and to delay any action he might contemplate, she faced the buccaneer.

He was dressed with barbaric magnificence in the riches and plunder he had appropriated, and he had adorned his person with a profusion of silver and gold, and stolen gems. He had been seated at the table while served by the maroon, but, as she entered, with unusual complaisance he arose and bowed to her with something of the grace of a gentleman.

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"Madam," he said, endeavoring to make soft and agreeable his harsh voice, "I trust you have been well treated since in my charge."

He had been drinking heavily she saw, but as he spoke her fair she would answer him accordingly. To treat him well, to temporize, and not to inflame his latent passion by unnecessarily crossing him, would be her best policy, she instantly divined, although she hated and despised him none the less. On his part, he had determined to try the gentler arts of persuasion, and though his face still bore the welts made by her riding whip the night before he strove to forget it and play the gentleman. He had some qualities, as a buccaneer, that might entitle him to a certain respect, but when he essayed the gentleman his performance was so futile that had it not been so terrible it would have been ludicrous. She answered his question calmly without exhibiting resentment or annoyance.

"We have been comfortably lodged and provided with food and drink in sufficiency, señor."

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"And what more would you have, Donna Mercedes?"

"Liberty, sir!"

"That shall be yours. Saving only my will, when you are married to me, you shall be as free as air. A free sailor and his free wife, lady. But will you not sit down?"

In compliance with his request, she seated herself on a chair which happened to be near where she stood; she noted with relief that the table was between them.

"Nay, not there," said the Captain instantly. "Here, madam, here, at my side."

"Not yet, señor capitan; it were not fit that a prisoner should occupy so high a seat of honor. Wait until——"

"Until what, pray?" he cried, leaning forward.

"Until that—until I—until we——"

In spite of her efforts she could not force her lips to admit the possibility of the realization of his desire.

"Until you are Lady Morgan?" he cried, his face flaming.

She buried her face in her hands at his suggestion, for she feared her horror in the thought would show too plainly there; and then because she dare not lose sight of him, she constrained herself to look at him once more. Her cheeks were burning with shame, her eyes flashing with indignation, though she forced her lips into the semblance of a smile.

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"That surprises you, does it?" continued the man with boasting condescension. "You did not think I designed so to honor you after last night, madam? Scuttle me, these"—pointing to his face—"are fierce love taps, but I fancy a strong will—when I can break it to mine own," he muttered, "and I have yet to see that in man or woman that could resist mine."

She noted with painful fascination the powerful movements of his lean fingers as he spoke, for his sinewy right hand, wrinkled and hideous, lay stretched out on the table before him, and he clasped and unclasped it unconsciously as he made his threat.

"I like you none the less for your spirit, ma'am. 'Fore God, it runs with your beauty. You are silent," he continued, staring at her with red-eyed, drunken suspicion. "You do not answer?"

"My lord," cried Mercedes, "I know not what to say."

"Say, 'Harry Morgan, I love you and I am yours.'"

"There is another present, señor."

"Where? Another? Who has dared—" roared the buccaneer glaring about him.

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"Thy servant—the negro."

"Oh," he laughed, "he is nothing. Black Dog, we call him. He is my slave, my shadow, my protection. He is always by."

An idea had swiftly flashed into the young girl's mind. If she could get rid of the slave she could

deal more easily with the master. She was tall, strong, and Morgan, it appeared, was not in full possession of his faculties or his strength from the liquor he had imbibed.

"Still," she urged, "I do not like to be wooed in the presence of another, even though he be a slave. 'Tis not a Spanish maiden's way, sir."

"Your will now, lady," said the buccaneer, with a hideous attempt at gallantry, "is my law. Afterwards—'twill be another matter. Out, Carib, but be within call. Now, madam, we are alone. Speak you the English tongue?"

The conversation had been carried on in Spanish heretofore.

"Indifferently, señor."

"Well, I'll teach it you. The lesson may as well begin now. Say after me, 'Harry'—I permit that though I am a belted knight of England, made so by His Merry Majesty, King Charles, God rest him. Drink to the repose of the king!" he cried, shoving a cup across the table toward her.

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Resisting a powerful temptation to throw it at him, and divining that the stimulant might be of assistance to her in the trying crisis in which she found herself, the girl lifted the cup to her lips, bowed to him, and swallowed a portion of the contents.

"Give it back to me!" he shouted. "You have tasted it, I drain it. Now the lesson. Say after me, 'Harry Morgan'—"

"Harry Morgan," gasped the girl.

"I love thee."

With a swift inward prayer she uttered the lying words.

"You have learned well, and art an apt pupil indeed," he cried, leering upon her in approbation and lustful desire—his very gaze was pollution to her. "D'ye know there are few women who can resist me when I try to be agreeable? Harry Morgan's way!" he laughed again. "There be some that I have won and many I have forced. None like you. So you love me? Scuttle me, I thought so. Ben Hornigold was right. Woo a woman, let her be clipped willingly in arms—yet there's a pleasure in breaking in the jades, after all. Still, I'm glad that you are in a better mood and have forgot that cursed Spaniard rotting in the dungeons below, in favor of a better man, Harry—no, I'll say, Sir Henry—Morgan—on this occasion, at your service," he cried, rising again and bowing to her as before.

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She looked desperately at the clock. The hour was close at hand. So great was the strain under which she was laboring that she felt she could not continue five minutes longer. Would Alvarado never come? Would anybody come? She sat motionless and white as marble, while the chieftain stared at her in the pauses of his monologue.

"Now, madam, since you have spoke the words perhaps you will further wipe out the recollection of this caress—" he pointed to his cheek again. "Curse me!" he cried in sudden heat, "you are the only human being that ever struck Harry Morgan on the face and lived to see the mark. I'd thought to wait until to-morrow and fetch some starveling priest to play his mummery, but why do so? We are alone here—together. There is none to disturb us. Black Dog watches. You love me, do you not?"

"I—I—" she gasped out, brokenly praying for strength, and fighting for time.

"You said it once, that's enough. Come, lady, let's have happiness while we may. Seal the bargain and kiss away the blows."

He came around the table and approached her. Notwithstanding the quantity of liquor he had taken he was physically master of himself, she noticed with a sinking heart. As he drew near, she sprang to her feet also and backed away from him, throwing out her left hand to ward him off, at the same time thrusting her right hand into her bosom.

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"Not now," she cried, finding voice and word in the imminence of the peril. "Oh, for God's sake —"

"'Tis useless to call on God in Harry Morgan's presence, mistress, for he is the only God that hears. Come and kiss me, thou black beauty—and then—"

"To-morrow, for Christ's sake!" cried the girl. "I am a Christian—I must have a priest—not now—to-morrow!"

She was backed against the wall and could go no further.

"To-night," chuckled the buccaneer.

He was right upon her now. She thrust him, unsuspecting and unprepared, violently from her, whipped out the dagger that Hornigold had given her, and faced him boldly.

It was ten o'clock and no one had yet appeared. The struck hour reverberated through the empty room. Would Alvarado never come? Had it not been that she hoped for him she would have driven the tiny weapon into her heart at once, but for his sake she would wait a little longer.

"Nay, come no nearer!" she cried resolutely. "If you do, you will take a dead woman in your arms. Back, I say!" menacing herself with the point. [Pg 317]

And the man noted that the hand holding the weapon did not tremble in the least.

"Thinkest thou that I could love such a man as thou?" she retorted, trembling with indignation, all the loathing and contempt she had striven to repress finding vent in her voice. "I'd rather be torn limb from limb than feel even the touch of thy polluting hand!"

"Death and fury!" shouted Morgan, struggling between rage and mortification, "thou hast lied to me then?"

"A thousand times—yes! Had I a whip I'd mark you again. Come within reach and I will drive the weapon home!"

She lifted it high in the air and shook it in defiance as she spoke.

It was a frightful imprudence, for which she paid dearly, however, for the hangings parted and Carib, who had heard what had gone on, entered the room—indeed, the voices of the man and woman filled with passion fairly rang through the hall. His quick eye took in the situation at once. He carried at his belt a long, heavy knife. Without saying a word, he pulled it out and threw it with a skill born of long practice, which made him a master at the game, fairly at the woman's uplifted hand. Before either Morgan or Mercedes were aware of his presence they heard the whistle of the heavy blade through the air. At the same moment the missile struck the blade of the dagger close to the palm of the woman and dashed it from her hand. Both weapons rebounded from the wall from the violence of the blow and fell at Morgan's feet. [Pg 318]

Mercedes was helpless.

"Well done, Carib!" cried Morgan exultantly. "Never has that old trick of thine served me better. Now, you she-devil—I have you in my power. Didst prefer death to Harry Morgan? Thou shalt have it, and thy lover, too. I'll tear him limb from limb and in thy presence, too, but not until after ___"

"Oh, God! oh, God!" shrieked Mercedes, flattening herself against the wall, shrinking from him with wide outstretched arms as he approached her. "Mercy!"

"I know not that word. Wouldst cozen me? Hast another weapon in thy bodice? I'll look."

Before she could prevent him he seized her dress at the collar with both hands and, in spite of her efforts, by a violent wrench tore it open.

"No weapon there," he cried. "Ha! That brings at last the color to your pale cheek!" he added, as the rich red crimsoned the ivory of her neck and cheek at this outrage. [Pg 319]

"Help, help!" she screamed. Her voice rang high through the apartment with indignant and terrified appeal.

"Call again," laughed Morgan.

"Kill me, kill me!" she begged.

"Nay, you must live to love me! Ho! ho!" he answered, taking her in his arms.

"Mercy! Help!" she cried in frenzy, all the woman in her in arms against the outrage, though she knew her appeal was vain, when, wonder of wonders—

"I heard a lady's voice," broke upon her ears from the other end of the room.

"De Lussan!" roared Morgan, releasing her and turning toward the intruder. "Here's no place for you. How came you here? I'd chosen this room for myself, I wish to be private. Out of it, and thank me for your life!"

"I know not why you should have Donna de Lara against her will, and when better men are here," answered the Frenchman, staring with bold, cruel glances at her, beautiful in her disarray, "and if you keep her you must fight for her. Mademoiselle," he continued, baring his sword gracefully and saluting her, "will you have me for your champion?" [Pg 320-322]



"Hast another weapon in thy bodice?"

His air was as gallant as if he had been a gentleman and bound in honor to rescue a lady in dire peril of life and honor, instead of another ruffian inflamed by her beauty and desirous to possess her himself.

"Save me! Save me," she cried, "from this man!"

She did not realize the meaning of de Lussan's words, she only saw a deliverer for the present. It was ten minutes past the hour now. She welcomed any respite; her lover might come at any moment.

"I will fight the both of you for her," cried the Frenchman; "you, Black Dog, and you, Master Morgan. Draw, unless you are a coward."

"I ought to have you hanged, you mutinous hound!" shouted Morgan, "and hanged you shall be, but not until I have proved myself your master with the sword, as in all other things. Watch the woman, Carib, and keep out of this fray. Lay hand on her at your peril! Remember, she is mine."

"Or it may be mine," answered de Lussan, as Morgan dashed at him.

They engaged without hesitation and the room was filled with the sound of ringing, grating steel. First pulling the pins from her glorious hair, Mercedes shook it down around her bare shoulders, and then stood, fascinated, watching the fencers. She could make no movement from the wall as the negro stood at her arm. For a space neither of the fighters had any advantage. De Lussan's skill was marvelous, but the chief buccaneer was more than his match. Presently the strength and capacity of the older and more experienced swordsman began to give him a slight advantage. Hard pressed, the Frenchman, still keeping an inexorable guard, slowly retreated up the room.

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Both men had been so intensely occupied with the fierce play that they had not heard the sound of many feet outside, a sudden tumult in the street. The keen ear of the half-breed, however, detected that something was wrong.

"Master," he cried, "some one comes. I hear shouts in the night air. A shot! Shrieks—groans! There! The clash of arms! Lower your weapons, sirs!" he cried again, as Spanish war cries filled the air. "We are betrayed; the enemy is on us!"

Instantly Morgan and de Lussan broke away from each other.

"To-morrow," cried the buccaneer captain.

"As you will," returned the other.

But now, Mercedes, staking all upon her hope, lifted her voice, and with tremendous power begot by fear and hope sent ringing through the air that name which to her meant salvation—


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"Alvarado! Alvarado!"

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CHAPTER XIX

HOW CAPTAIN ALVARADO CROSSED THE MOUNTAINS, FOUND THE VICEROY, AND PLACED HIS LIFE IN HIS MASTER'S HANDS

he highway between La Guayra and Venezuela was exceedingly rough and difficult, and at best barely practicable for the stoutest wagons. The road wound around the mountains for a distance of perhaps twenty-five miles, although as the crow flies it was not more than five miles between the two cities. Between them, however, the tremendous ridge of mountains rose to a height of nearly ten thousand feet. Starting from the very level of the sea, the road crossed the divide through a depression at an altitude of about six thousand feet and descended thence some three thousand feet to the valley in which lay Caracas.

This was the road over which Alvarado and Mercedes had come and on the lower end of which they had been captured. It was now barred for the young soldier by the detachment of buccaneers under young Teach and L'Ollonais, who were instructed to hold the pass where the road crossed through, or over, the mountains. Owing to the configuration of the pass, that fifty could hold it against a thousand. It was not probable that news of the sack of La Guayra would reach Caracas before Morgan descended upon it, but to prevent the possibility, or to check any movement of troops toward the shore, it was necessary to hold that road. The man who held it was in position to protect or strike either city at will. It was, in fact, the key to the position.

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Morgan, of course, counted upon surprising the unfortified capital as he had the seaport town. It was the boast of the Spaniards that they needed no walls about Caracas, since nature had provided them with the mighty rampart of the mountain range, which could not be surmounted save in that one place. With that one place in the buccaneer's possession, Caracas could only rely upon the number and valor of her defenders. To Morgan's onslaught could only be opposed a rampart of blades and hearts. Had there been a state of war in existence it is probable that the Viceroy would have fortified and garrisoned the pass, but under present conditions nothing had been done. As soon as a messenger from Teach informed Morgan that the pass had been occupied and that all seemed quiet in Caracas, a fact which had been learned by some bold scouting on the farther side of the mountain, he was perfectly easy as to the work of the morrow. He would fall upon the unwallied town at night and carry everything by a *coup de main*.

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Fortunately for the Spaniards in this instance, it happened that there was another way of access to the valley of Caracas from La Guayra. Directly up and over the mountain there ran a narrow and difficult trail, known first to the savages and afterwards to wandering smugglers or masterless outlaws. Originally, and until the Spaniards made the wagon road, it had been the only way of communication between the two towns. But the path was so difficult and so dangerous that it had long since been abandoned, even by the classes which had first discovered and traveled it. These vagabonds had formerly kept it in such a state of repair that it was fairly passable, but no work had been done on it for nearly one hundred years. Indeed, in some places, the way had been designedly obliterated by the Spanish Government about a century since, after one of the most daring exploits that ever took place in the new world.

Ninety years before this incursion by the buccaneers, a bold English naval officer, Sir Amyas Preston, after seizing La Guayra, had captured Caracas by means of this path. The Spaniards, apprised of his descent upon their coasts, had fortified the mountain pass but had neglected this mountain trail, as a thing impracticable for any force. Preston, however, adroitly concealing his movements, had actually forced his men to ascend the trail. The ancient chroniclers tell of the terrific nature of the climb, how the exhausted and frightened English sailors dropped upon the rocks, appalled by their dangers and worn out by their hardships, how Preston and his officers forced them up at the point of the sword until finally they gained the crest and descended into the valley. They found the town unprotected, for all its defenders were in the pass, seized it, held it for ransom, then, sallying forth, took the surprised Spanish troops in the pass in the rear and swept them away.

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After this exploit some desultory efforts had been made by the Spaniards to render the trail still more impracticable with such success as has been stated, and it gradually fell into entire disuse. By nearly all the inhabitants its very existence had been forgotten.

It was this trail that Alvarado determined to ascend. The difficulties in his way, even under the most favorable circumstances, might well have appalled the stoutest-hearted mountaineer. In the darkness they would be increased a thousand-fold. He had not done a great deal of mountain climbing, although every one who lived in Venezuela was more or less familiar with the practice; but he was possessed of a cool head, an unshakable nerve, a resolute determination, and unbounded strength, which now stood him in good stead. And he had back of him, to urge him, every incentive in the shape of love and duty that could move humanity to godlike deed.

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Along the base of the mountain the trail was not difficult although it was pitch-dark under the trees which, except where the mighty cliffs rose sheer in the air like huge buttresses of the range, covered the mountains for the whole expanse of their great altitude, therefore he made his way upward without trouble or accident at first. The moon's rays could not pierce the density of the tropic foliage, of course, but Alvarado was very familiar with this easier portion of the way, for he had often traversed it on hunting expeditions, and he made good progress for several hours in spite of the obscurity.

It had been long past midnight when he started, and it was not until daybreak that he passed above the familiar and not untrodden way and entered upon the most perilous part of his journey. The gray dawn revealed to him the appalling dangers he must face.

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Sometimes clinging with iron grasp to pinnacles of rock, he swung himself along the side of some terrific precipice, where the slightest misstep meant a rush into eternity upon the rocks a thousand feet below. Sometimes he had to spring far across great gorges in the mountains that had once been bridged by mighty trunks of trees, long since moldered away. Sometimes there was nothing for him to do but to scramble down the steep sides of some dark cañon and force himself through cold torrential mountain streams that almost swept him from his feet. Again his path lay over cliffs green with moss and wet with spray, which afforded most precarious support to his grasping hands or slipping feet. Sometimes he had to force a way through thick tropic undergrowth that tore his clothing into rags.

Had he undertaken the ascent in a mere spirit of adventure he would have turned back long since from the dangers he met and surmounted with such hardship and difficulty; but he was sustained by the thought of the dreadful peril of the woman he loved, the remembrance of the sufferings of the hapless townspeople, and a consuming desire for revenge upon the man who had wrought this ruin on the shore. With the pale, beautiful face of Mercedes to lead him, and by contrast the hateful, cruel countenance of Morgan to force him, ever before his vision, the man plunged upward with unnatural strength, braving dangers, taking chances, doing the impossible—and Providence watched over him.

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It was perhaps nine o'clock in the morning when he reached the summit—breathless, exhausted, unhelmed, weaponless, coatless, in rags; torn, bruised, bleeding, but unharmed—and looked down on the white city of Caracas set in its verdant environment like a handful of pearls in a goblet of emerald. He had wondered if he would be in time to intercept the Viceroy, and his strained heart leaped in his tired breast when he saw, a few miles beyond the town on the road winding toward the Orinoco country, a body of men. The sunlight blazing from polished helms or pointed lance tips proclaimed that they were soldiers. He would be in time, thank God!

With renewed vigor, he scrambled down the side of the mountain—and this descent fortunately happened to be gentle and easy—and running with headlong speed, he soon drew near the gate of the palace. He dashed into it with reckless haste, indifferent to the protests of the guard, who did not at first recognize in the tattered, bloody, wounded, soiled specimen of humanity his gay and gallant commander. He made himself known at once, and was confirmed in his surmise that the Viceroy had set forth with his troops early in the morning and was still in reaching distance on the road.

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**... he reached the summit—breathless,
exhausted, unhelmed, weaponless,
coatless, in rags; torn, bruised, bleeding,
but unharmed.**

Directing the best horse in the stables to be brought to him, after snatching a hasty meal while it

was being saddled, and not even taking time to re-clothe himself, he mounted and galloped after. An hour later he burst through the ranks of the little army and reined in his horse before the astonished Viceroy, who did not recognize in this sorry cavalier his favorite officer, and stern words of reproof for the unceremonious interruption of the horseman broke from his lips until they were checked by the first word from the young captain.

"The buccaneers have taken La Guayra and sacked it!" gasped Alvarado hoarsely.

"Alvarado!" cried the Viceroy, recognizing him as he spoke. "Are you mad?"

"Would God I were, my lord."

"The buccaneers?"

"Morgan—all Spain hates him with reason—led them!"

"Morgan! That accursed scourge again in arms? Impossible! I don't understand!"

"The very same! 'Tis true! 'tis true! Oh, your Excellency——"

"And my daughter——"

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"A prisoner! For God's love turn back the men!"

"Instantly!" cried the Viceroy.

He was burning with anxiety to hear more, but he was too good a soldier to hesitate as to the first thing to be done. Raising himself in his stirrups he gave a few sharp commands and the little army, which had halted when he had, faced about and began the return march to Caracas at full speed. As soon as their manœuvres had been completed and they moved off, the Viceroy, who rode at the head with Alvarado and the gentlemen of his suite, broke into anxious questioning.

"Now, Captain, but that thou art a skilled soldier I could not believe thy tale."

"My lord, I swear it is true!"

"And you left Donna Mercedes a prisoner?" interrupted de Tobar, who had been consumed with anxiety even greater than that of the Viceroy.

"Alas, 'tis so."

"How can that be when you are free, señor?"

"Let me question my own officer, de Tobar," resumed the Viceroy peremptorily, "and silence, all, else we learn nothing. Now, Alvarado. What is this strange tale of thine?"

"My lord, after we left you yesterday morning we made the passage safely down the mountain. Toward evening as we approached La Guayra, just before the point where the road turns into the strand, we were set upon by men in ambush. The soldiers and attendants were without exception slain. Although I fought and beat down one or two of our assailants, they struck me to the earth and took me alive. The two ladies and I alone escaped. No indignity was offered them. I was bound and we were led along the road to a camp. There appeared to be some three hundred and fifty men under the leadership of a man who claimed to be Sir Henry Morgan, sometime pirate and robber, later Vice-Governor of Jamaica, now, as I gathered, in rebellion against his king and in arms against us. They captured the plate galleon with lading from Porto Bello and Peru, and were wrecked on this coast to the westward of La Guayra. They had determined upon the capture of that town, whence they expected to move on Caracas."

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"And Mercedes?" again interrupted the impetuous and impassioned de Tobar.

"Let him tell his tale!" commanded the Viceroy, sternly. "It behooves us, gentlemen, to think first of the cities of our King."

"They had captured a band of holy nuns and priests. These were forced, especially the women, by threats you can imagine, to plant scaling ladders against the walls, and, although the troops made a brave defense, the buccaneers mastered them. They carried the place by storm and sacked it. When I left it was burning in several places and turned into a hell."

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"My God!" ejaculated the old man, amid the cries and oaths of his fierce, infuriated men. "And now tell me about Mercedes."

"Morgan—who met her, you remember, when we stopped at Jamaica on our return from Madrid?"

"Yes, yes!"

"He is in love with her. He wanted to make her his wife. Therefore he kept her from the soldiery."

In his eagerness the Viceroy reined in his horse, and the officers and men, even the soldiers, stopped also and crowded around the narrator.

"Did he—did he—O Holy Mother have pity upon me!" groaned the Viceroy.

"He did her no violence save to kiss her, while I was by."

"And you suffered it!" shouted de Tobar, beside himself with rage.

"What did she then?" asked the old man, waving his hand for silence.

"She struck him in the face again and again with her riding-whip. I was bound, señors. I broke my bonds, struck down one of the guards, wrested a sword from another, and sprang to defend her. But they overpowered me. Indeed, they seized the lady and swore to kill her unless I dropped my weapon."

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"Death," cried de Lara, "would have been perhaps a fitting end for her. What more?"

"We were conveyed into the city after the sack. He insulted her again with his compliments and propositions. He sent a slave to fetch her, but, bound as I was, I sprang upon him and beat him down."

"And then?"

"Then one of his men, an ancient, one-eyed sailor, interfered and bade him look to the town, else it would be burned over his head, and urged him to secure the pass. In this exigency the pirate desisted from his plan against the lady. He sent Donna Mercedes to a dungeon, me to another."

"How came you here, sir, and alone?" asked de Tobar, again interrupting, and this time the Viceroy, pitying the agony of the lover, permitted the question. "Did you, a Spanish officer, leave the lady defenseless amid those human tigers?"

"There was nothing else to do, Don Felipe. The sailor who interfered, he set me free. I did refuse to leave without the señorita. He told me I must go without her or not at all. He promised to protect her honor or to kill her—at least to furnish her with a weapon. To go, to reach you, your Excellency, was the only chance for her. Going, I might save her; staying, I could only die."

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"You did rightly. I commend you," answered the veteran. "Go on."

"My lord, I thank you. The way over the road was barred by the party that had seized the pass."

"And how came you?"

"Straight over the mountain, sir."

"What! The Indian trail? The English way?"

"The same."

"What next?"

"At ten to-night, the sailor who released me will open the city gate, the west gate, beneath the shadow of the cliffs—we must be there!"

"But how? Can we take the pass? It is strongly held, you say."

"My lord, give me fifty brave men who will volunteer to follow me. I will lead them back over the trail and we will get to the rear of the men holding the pass. Do you make a feint at engaging them in force in front and when their attention is distracted elsewhere we will fall on and drive them into your arms. By this means we open the way. Then we will post down the mountains with speed and may arrive in time. Nay, we must arrive in time! Hornigold, the sailor, would guarantee nothing beyond to-night. The buccaneers are drunk with liquor; tired out with slaughter. They will suspect nothing. We can master the whole three hundred and fifty of them with five score men."

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"Alvarado," cried the Viceroy, "thou hast done well. I thank thee. Let us but rescue my daughter and defeat these buccaneers and thou mayest ask anything at my hands—saving one thing. Gentlemen and soldiers, you have heard the plan of the young captain. Who will volunteer to go over the mountains with him?"

Brandishing their swords and shouting with loud acclaim the great body of troopers pressed forward to the service. Alvarado, who knew them all, rapidly selected the requisite number, and they fell in advance of the others. Over them the young captain placed his friend de Tobar as his second in command.

"'Tis bravely done!" cried the Viceroy. "Now prick forward to the city, all. We'll refresh ourselves in view of the arduous work before us and then make our further dispositions."

The streets of Caracas were soon full of armed men preparing for their venture. As soon as the plight of La Guayra and the Viceroy's daughter became known there was scarcely a civilian, even, who did not offer himself for the rescue. The Viceroy, however, would take only mounted men, and of these only tried soldiers. Alvarado, whom excitement and emotion kept from realizing his fatigue, was provided with fresh apparel, after which he requested a private audience for a moment or two with the Viceroy, and together they repaired to the little cabinet which had been the scene of the happenings the night before.

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"Your Excellency," began the young man, slowly, painfully, "I could not wait even the hoped-for happy issue of our plans to place my sword and my life in your hands."

"What have you done?" asked the old man, instantly perceiving the seriousness of the situation

from the anguish in his officer's look and voice.

"I have broken my word—forfeited my life."

"Proceed."

"I love the Donna Mercedes——"

"You promised to say nothing—to do nothing."

"That promise I did not keep."

"Explain."

"There is nothing to explain. I was weak—it was beyond my strength. I offer no excuse."

"You urge nothing in extenuation?"

"Nothing."

"'Twas deliberately done?"

"Nay, not that; but I——"

"S'death! What did you?"

"I told her that I loved her, again——"

"Shame! Shame!"

"I took her into my arms once more——"

"Thou double traitor! And she——"

"My lord, condemn her not. She is young—a woman."

"I do not consider Captain Alvarado, a dishonored soldier, my proper mentor. I shall know how to treat my daughter. What more?"

"Nothing more. We abandoned ourselves to our dream, and at the first possible moment I am come to tell you all—to submit——"

"Hast no plea to urge?" persisted the old man.

"None."

"But your reason? By God's death, why do you tell me these things? If thou art base enough to fall, why not base enough to conceal?"

"I could not do so, your Excellency. I am not master of myself when she is by—'tis only when away from her I see things in their proper light. She blinds me. No, sir," cried the unhappy Alvarado, seeing a look of contempt on the grim face of the old general, "I do not urge this in defense, but you wanted explanation."

"Nothing can explain the falsehood of a gentleman, the betrayal of a friend, the treachery of a soldier." [Pg 343]

"Nothing—hence I am here."

"Perhaps I have estimated you too highly," went on the old man musingly. "I had hoped you were gentle—but base blood must run in your veins."

"It may be," answered the young man brokenly, and then he added, as one detail not yet told, "I have found my mother, sir."

"Thy mother? What is her condition?" cried the Viceroy, in curious and interested surprise that made him forget his wrath and contempt for the moment.

"She was an abbess of our Holy Church. She died upon the sands of La Guayra by her own hand rather than surrender her honor or lend aid to the sack of the town."

"That was noble," interrupted the old de Lara. "I may be mistaken after all. Yet 'twere well she died, for she will not see——"

He paused significantly.

"My shame?" asked Alvarado.

"Thy death, señor, for what you have done. No other punishment is meet. Did Donna Mercedes send any message to me?"

Alvarado could not trust himself to speak. He bowed deeply.

"What was it?"

The young man stood silent before him.

"Well, I will learn from her own lips if she be alive when we come to the city. I doubt not it will

excuse thee."

"I seek not to shelter myself behind a woman."

"That's well," said the old man. "But now, what is to be done with thee?"

"My lord, give me a chance, not to live, but to die honestly. Let me play my part this day as becomes a man, and when Donna Mercedes is restored to your arms——"

"Thou wilt plead for life?"

"Nay, as God hears me, I will not live dishonored. Life is naught to me without the lady. I swear to thee——"

"You have given me your word before, sir," said the old man sternly.

"On this cross—it was my mother's," he pulled from his doublet the silver crucifix and held it up. "I will yield my life into your hands without question then, and acclaim before the world that you are justified in taking it. Believe me——"

"Thou didst betray me once."

"But not this time. Before God—by Christ, His Mother, by my own mother, dead upon the sands, by all that I have hoped for, by my salvation, I swear if I survive the day I will go gladly to my death at your command!"

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"I will trust you once more, thus far. Say naught of this to any one. Leave me!"

"Your Excellency," cried the young man, kneeling before him, "may God reward you!"

He strove to take the hand of the old man, but the latter drew it away.

"Even the touch of forsworn lips is degradation. You have your orders. Go!"

Alvarado buried his face in his hands, groaned bitterly, and turned away without another word.

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CHAPTER XX

WHEREIN MASTER TEACH, THE PIRATE, DIES BETTER THAN HE LIVED

It was nearing eleven o'clock in the morning when, after a hurried conference in the patio with the Viceroy and the others, Alvarado and de Tobar marched out with their fifty men. They had discarded all superfluous clothing; they were unarmored and carried no weapons but swords and pistols. In view of the hard climb before them and the haste that was required, they wished to be burdened as lightly as possible. Their horses were brought along in the train of the Viceroy's party which moved out upon the open road to the pass at the same time. These last went forward with great ostentation, the forlorn hope secretly, lest some from the buccaneers might be watching.

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The fifty volunteers were to ascend the mountain with all speed, make their way along the crest as best they could, until they came within striking distance of the camp of the pirates. Then they were to conceal themselves in the woods there and when the Viceroy made a feigned attack with the main body of his troops from the other side of the mountain, they were to leave their hiding-place and fall furiously upon the rear of the party. Fortunately, they were not required to ascend such a path as that Alvarado had traversed on the other side, for there were not fifty men in all Venezuela who could have performed that tremendous feat of mountaineering. The way to the summit of the range and thence to the pass was difficult, but not impossible, and they succeeded after an hour or two of hard climbing in reaching their appointed station, where they concealed themselves in the woods, unobserved by Teach's men.

The Viceroy carried out his part of the programme with the promptness of a soldier. Alvarado's men had scarcely settled themselves in the thick undergrowth beneath the trees whence they could overlook the buccaneers in camp on the road below them, before a shot from the pirate sentry who had been posted toward Caracas called the fierce marauders to arms. They ran to the rude barricade they had erected covering the pass and made preparation for battle. Soon the wood was ringing with shouts and cries and the sound of musketry.

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Although Teach was a natural soldier and L'Ollonais an experienced and prudent commander, they took no precaution whatever to cover their rear, for such a thing as an assault from that direction was not even dreamed of.

Alvarado and de Tobar, therefore, led their men forward without the slightest opposition. Even

the noise they made crashing through the undergrowth was lost in the sound of the battle, and attracted no attention from the enemy. It was not until they burst out into the open road and charged forward, cheering madly, that the buccaneers realized their danger. Some of them faced about, only to be met by a murderous discharge from the pistols of the forlorn hope, and the next moment the Spaniards were upon them. The party holding the pass were the picked men, veterans, among the marauders. They met the onset with tremendous courage and crossed blades in the smoke like men, but at the same instant the advance guard of the main army sprang at the barricade and assaulted them vigorously from the other side. The odds were too much for the buccaneers, and after a wild mêlée in which they lost heavily, the survivors gave ground.

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The road immediately below the pass opened on a little plateau, back of which rose a precipitous wall of rock. Thither such of the buccaneers as were left alive hastily retreated. There were perhaps a dozen men able to use their weapons; among them Teach was the only officer. L'Ollonois had been cut down by de Tobar in the first charge. The Spaniards burst through the pass and surrounded the buccaneers. The firearms on both sides had all been discharged, and in the excitement no one thought of reloading; indeed, with the cumbersome and complicated weapons then in vogue there was no time, and the Spaniards, who had paid dearly for their victory, so desperate had been the defence of the pirates, were fain to finish this detachment in short order.

"Yield!" cried Alvarado, as usual in the front ranks of his own men. "You are hopelessly overmatched," pointing with dripping blade to his own and the Viceroy's soldiers as he spoke.

"Shall we get good quarter?" called out Teach.

A splendid specimen he looked of an Englishman at bay, in spite of his wicked calling, standing with his back against the towering rock, his bare and bloody sword extended menacingly before him, the bright sunlight blazing upon his sunny hair, his blue eyes sparkling with battle-lust and determined courage. Quite the best of the pirates, he!

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"You shall be hung like the dogs you are," answered Alvarado sternly.

"We'd rather die sword in hand, eh, lads?"

"Ay, ay."

"Come on, then, señors," laughed the Englishman gallantly, saluting with his sword, "and see how bravely we English can die when the game is played and we have lost."

Though his cause was bad and his life also, his courage was magnificent. Under other circumstances it would have evoked the appreciation of Alvarado and some consideration at his hands. Possibly he might even have granted life to the man, but memory of the sights of the night before in that devastated town six thousand feet below their feet, and the deadly peril of his sweetheart banished pity from his soul. This man had been the right hand of Morgan; he was, after the captain, the ablest man among the buccaneers. He must die, and it would be a mercy to kill him out of hand, anyway.

"Forward, gentlemen!" he cried, and instantly the whole mass closed in on the pirates. Such a fight as Teach and his men made was marvellous. For each life the Spaniards took the pirates exacted a high price, but the odds were too great for any human valor, however splendid, to withstand, and in a brief space the last of the buccaneers lay dying on the hill.

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Teach was game to the last. Pierced with a dozen wounds, his sword broken to pieces, he lifted himself on his elbow, and with a smile of defiance gasped out the brave chorus of the song of the poet of London town:

"Though life now is pleasant and sweet to the sense,
We'll be damnably mouldy a hundred years hence."

"Tell Morgan," he faltered, "we did not betray—faithful to the end——"

And so he died as he had lived.

"A brave man!" exclaimed de Tobar with some feeling in his voice.

"But a black-hearted scoundrel, nevertheless," answered Alvarado sternly. "Had you seen him last night——"

"Ye have been successful, I see, gentlemen," cried the Viceroy, riding up with the main body. "Where is Alvarado?"

"I am here, your Excellency."

"You are yet alive, señor?"

"My work is not yet complete," answered the soldier, "and I can not die until—I—Donna Mer——"

"Bring up the led horses," interrupted the Viceroy curtly. "Mount these gentlemen. Let the chirurgeons look to the Spanish wounded."

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"And if there be any buccaneers yet alive?" asked one of the officers.

"Toss them over the cliff," answered the Viceroy; "throw the bodies of all the carrion over, living

or dead. They pollute the air. Form up, gentlemen! We have fully twenty-five miles between us and the town which we must reach at ten of the clock. 'Twill be hard riding. Alvarado, assemble your men and you and de Tobar lead the way, I will stay farther back and keep the main body from scattering. We have struck a brave blow first, and may God and St. Jago defend us further. Forward!"

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CHAPTER XXI

THE RECITAL OF HOW CAPTAIN ALVARADO AND DON FELIPE DE TOBAR CAME TO THE RESCUE IN THE NICK OF TIME



ld Hornigold had kept his promise, and Alvarado had kept his as well. It was a few minutes before ten when the first Spanish horsemen sprang from their jaded steeds at the end of the road. In that wild race down the mountains, Alvarado had ridden first with de Tobar ever by his side. None had been able to pass these two. The Viceroy had fallen some distance behind. For one reason, he was an old man, and the pace set by the lovers was killing. For another and a better, as he had said, he thought it desirable to stay somewhat in the rear to keep the men closed up; but the pace even of the last and slowest had been a tremendous one. Sparing neither themselves nor their horses, they had raced down the perilous way. Some of them had gone over the cliffs to instant destruction; others had been heavily thrown by the stumbling horses. Some of the horses had given out under the awful gallop and had fallen exhausted, but when the riders were unhurt they had joined the foot soldiers marching after the troopers as fast they could.

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Alvarado's soldierly instincts had caused him to halt where the road opened upon the sand, for he and de Tobar and the two or three who kept near them could do nothing alone. They were forced to wait until a sufficient force had assembled to begin the attack. He would have been there before the appointed time had it not been for this imperative delay, which demonstrated his

capacity more than almost anything else could have done, for he was burning to rush to the rescue of Mercedes.

Indeed, he had been compelled to restrain by force the impetuous and undisciplined de Tobar, who thought of nothing but the peril of the woman he adored. There had been a fierce altercation between the two young men before the latter could be persuaded that Alvarado was right. Each moment, however, added to the number of the party. There was no great distance between the first and last, and after a wait of perhaps ten or fifteen minutes, some one hundred and fifty horsemen were assembled. The Viceroy had not come up with the rest, but they were sure he would be along presently, and Alvarado would wait no longer.

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Bidding the men dismount lest they should be observed on horseback, and stationing one to acquaint the Viceroy with his plans, he divided his troop into three companies, he and de Tobar taking command of one and choosing the nearest fort as their objective point. Captain Agramonte, a veteran soldier, was directed to scour the town, and Lieutenant Nuñez, another trusted officer, was ordered to master the eastern fort on the other side. They were directed to kill every man whom they saw at large in the city, shooting or cutting down every man abroad without hesitation, for Alvarado rightly divined that all the inhabitants would be penned up in some prison or other and that none would be on the streets except the buccaneers. There were still enough pirates in the city greatly to outnumber his force, but many of them were drunk and all of them, the Spaniard counted, would be unprepared. The advantage of the surprise would be with his own men. If he could hold them in play for twenty minutes the Viceroy with another detachment would arrive, and thereafter the end would be certain. They could take prisoners then and reserve them for torture and death—some meet punishment for their crimes.

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Those necessary preparations were made with the greatest speed, the men were told off in their respective companies, and then, keeping close under the shadow of the cliff for fear of a possible watcher, they started forward.

Since ten old Ben Hornigold had been hidden in an arched recess of the gateway waiting their arrival. He had thought, as the slow minutes dragged by, that Alvarado had failed, and he began to contrive some way by which he could account for his escape to Morgan in the morning, when the captain would ask to have him produced, but the arrival of the Spaniards relieved his growing anxiety.

"Donna Mercedes?" asked Alvarado of the old boatswain, as he entered the gate.

"Safe when I left her in the guardroom with Morgan—and armed. If you would see her alive——"

"This way——" cried Alvarado, dashing madly along the street toward the fort.

Every man had his weapons in hand, and the little party had scarcely gone ten steps before they

met a buccaneer. He had been asleep when he should have watched, and had just been awakened by the sound of their approach. He opened his mouth to cry out, but Alvarado thrust his sword through him before he could utter a sound. The moonlight made the street as light as day, and before they had gone twenty steps farther, turning the corner, they came upon a little party of the pirates. An immediate alarm was given by them. The Spaniards brushed them aside by the impetuosity of their onset, but on this occasion pistols were brought in play. Screams and cries followed the shots, and calls to arms rang through the town.

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But by this time the other companies were in the city, and they were making terrible havoc as they ran to their appointed stations. The buccaneers came pouring from the houses, most of them arms in hand. It could not be denied that they were ready men. But the three attacks simultaneously delivered bewildered them. The streets in all directions seemed full of foes. The advantage of the surprise was with the Spanish. The pirates were without leadership for the moment and ran aimlessly to and fro, not knowing where to rally; yet little bands did gather together instinctively, and these began to make some headway against the Spanish soldiery. Even the cowards fought desperately, for around every neck was already the feel of a halter.

Alvarado and de Tobar soon found themselves detached from their company. Indeed, as the time progressed and the buccaneers began to perceive the situation they put up a more and more stubborn and successful opposition. They rallied in larger parties and offered a stout resistance to the Spanish charges. Disregarding their isolation, the two young officers ran to the fort. Fortunately the way in that direction was not barred. The solitary sentry at the gateway attempted to check them, but they cut him down in an instant. As they mounted the stair they heard, above the shrieks and cries and shots of the tumult that came blowing in the casement with the night wind, the sound of a woman's screams.

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"Mercedes!" cried de Tobar. "It is she!"

They bounded up the stairs, overthrowing one or two startled men who would have intercepted them, and darted to the guardroom. They tore the heavy hangings aside and found themselves in a blaze of light in the long apartment. Two men confronted them. Back of the two, against the wall, in a piteous state of disorder and terror, stood the woman they both loved. In front of her, knife in hand, towered the half-breed.

"Treason, treason!" shouted Morgan furiously. "We are betrayed! At them, de Lussan!"

As he spoke the four men crossed swords. De Tobar was not the master of the weapon that the others were. After a few rapid parries and lunges the Frenchman had the measure of his brave young opponent. Then, with a laugh of evil intent, by a clever play he beat down the Spaniard's guard, shattering his weapon, and with a thrust as powerful as it was skilful, he drove the blade up to the hilt in poor de Tobar's bosom. The gallant but unfortunate gentleman dropped his own sword as he fell, and clasped his hands by a convulsive effort around the blade of de Lussan. Such was the violence of his grasp that he fairly hugged the sword to his breast, and when he fell backward upon the point the blade snapped. He was done for.

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Morgan and Alvarado, on the other hand, were more equally matched. Neither had gained an advantage, although both fought with energy and fury. Alvarado was silent, but Morgan made the air ring with shouts and cries for his men. As the swords clashed, Carib raised his hand to fling his knife at Alvarado, but, just as the weapon left his fingers, Mercedes threw herself upon him. The whizzing blade went wild. With a savage oath he seized a pistol and ran toward the Spaniard, who was at last getting the better of the Captain. A cry from Mercedes warned Alvarado of this new danger. Disengaging suddenly, he found himself at sword's point with de Lussan, who had withdrawn his broken weapon from de Tobar's body and was menacing him with it. With three opponents before him he backed up against the wall and at last gave tongue.

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"To me!" he cried loudly, hoping some of his men were within call. "Alvarado!"

As he spoke Morgan closed with him once more, shouting:

"On him, de Lussan! Let him have it, Black Dog! We've disposed of one!"

As the blades crossed again, the desperate Spaniard, who was a swordsman of swordsmen, put forth all his power. There was a quick interchange of thrust and parry, and the weapon went whirling from the hand of the chief buccaneer. Quick as thought Alvarado shortened his arm and drove home the stroke. Morgan's life trembled in the balance. The maroon, however, who had been seeking a chance to fire, threw himself between the two men and received the force of the thrust full in the heart. His pistol was discharged harmlessly. He fell dead at his master's feet without even a groan. No more would Black Dog watch behind the old man's chair. He had been faithful to his hideous leader and his hideous creed. Before Alvarado could recover his guard, de Lussan struck him with his broken sword. The blow was parried by arm and dagger, but the force of it sent the Spaniard reeling against the wall. At the same instant Morgan seized a pistol and snapped it full in his face. The weapon missed fire, but the buccaneer, clutching the barrel, beat him down with a fierce blow.

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"So much for these two," he roared. "Let's to the street."

De Lussan seized Alvarado's sword, throwing away his own. Morgan picked up his own blade again, and the two ran from the room.

A stern fight was being waged in the square, whither all the combatants had congregated, the

buccaneers driven there, the Spaniards following. The disciplined valor and determination of the Spanish, however, were slowly causing the buccaneers to give ground. No Spanish soldiers that ever lived could have defeated the old-time buccaneers, but these were different, and their best men had been killed with Teach and L'Ollonais. The opportune arrival of Morgan and de Lussan, however, put heart in their men. Under the direction of these two redoubtable champions they began to make stouter resistance.

The battle might have gone in their favor if, in the very nick of time, the Viceroy himself and the remainder of the troops had not come up. They had not thought it necessary to come on foot since the surprise had been effected, and the Viceroy rightly divined they would have more advantage if mounted. Choosing the very freshest horses therefore, he had put fifty of the best soldiers upon them and had led them up on a gallop, bidding the others follow on with speed. The fighting had gradually concentrated before the church and in the eastern fort, where Braziliano had his headquarters. The arrival of the horsemen decided the day. Morgan and de Lussan, fighting desperately in the front ranks with splendid courage, were overriden. De Lussan was wounded, fell, and was trampled to death by the Spanish horsemen, and Morgan was taken prisoner, alive and unharmed. When he saw that all was lost, he had thrown himself upon the enemy, seeking a death in the fight, which, by the Viceroy's orders, was denied him. Many of the other buccaneers also were captured alive; indeed, the Viceroy desired as many of them saved as possible. He could punish a living man in a way to make him feel something of the torture he had inflicted, and for this reason those who surrendered had been spared for the present.

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Indeed, after the capture of Morgan the remaining buccaneers threw down their arms and begged for mercy. They might as well have appealed to a stone wall for that as to their Spanish captors. A short shrift and a heavy punishment were promised them in the morning. Meanwhile, after a brief struggle, the east fort was taken by assault, and Braziliano was wounded and captured with most of his men. The town was in the possession of the Spanish at last. It was all over in a quarter of an hour.

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Instantly the streets were filled with a mob of men, women, and children, whose lives had been spared, bewildered by the sudden release from their imminent peril and giving praise to God and the Viceroy and his men. As soon as he could make himself heard in the confusion de Lara inquired for Alvarado.

"Where is he?" he cried. "And de Tobar?"

"My lord," answered one of the party, "we were directed to take the west fort and those two cavaliers were in the lead, but the pressure of the pirates was so great that we were stopped and have not seen them since. They were ahead of us."

"De Cordova," cried the old man to one of his colonels, "take charge of the town. Keep the women and children and inhabitants together where they are for the present. Let your soldiery patrol the streets and search every house from top to bottom. Let no one of these ruffianly scoundrels escape. Take them alive. We'll deal with them in the morning. Fetch Morgan to the west fort after us. Come, gentlemen, we shall find our comrades there, and pray God the ladies have not yet— are still unharmed!"

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A noble old soldier was de Lara. He had not sought his daughter until he had performed his full duty in taking the town.

The anteroom of the fort they found in a state of wild confusion. The dead bodies of the sentry and the others the two cavaliers had cut down on the stairs were ruthlessly thrust aside, and the party of gentlemen with the Viceroy in the lead poured into the guardroom. There, on his back, was stretched the hideous body of the half-breed where he had fallen. There, farther away, the unfortunate de Tobar lay, gasping for breath yet making no outcry. He was leaning on his arm and staring across the room, with anguish in his face not due to the wound he had received but to a sight which broke his heart.

"Alas, de Tobar!" cried the Viceroy. "Where is Mercedes?"

He followed the glance of the dying man. There at the other side of the room lay a prostrate body, and over it bent a moaning, sobbing figure. It was Mercedes.

"Mercedes!" cried the Viceroy running toward her. "Alvarado!"

"Tell me," he asked in a heartbreaking voice. "Art thou—"

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"Safe yet and—well," answered the girl; "they came in the very nick of time. Oh, Alvarado, Alvarado!" she moaned.

"Señorita," cried one of the officers, "Don Felipe here is dying. He would speak with you."

Mercedes suffered herself to be led to where de Tobar lay upon the floor. One of his comrades had taken his head on his knee. The very seconds of his life were numbered. Lovely in her grief Mercedes knelt at his side, a great pity in her heart. The Viceroy stepped close to him.

"I thank you, too," she said. "Poor Don Felipe, he and you saved me, but at the expense of your lives. Would God you could have been spared!"

"Nay," gasped the dying man, "thou lovest him. I—watched thee. I heard thee call upon his name. Thou wert not for me, and so I die willingly. He is a noble gentleman. Would he might have won

thee!"

The man trembled with the violent effort it cost him to speak. He gasped faintly and strove to smile. By an impulse for which she was ever after grateful, she bent her head, slipped her arm around his neck, lifted him up, and kissed him. In spite of his death agony, at that caress he smiled up at her.

"Now," he murmured, "I die happy—content—you kissed—me—Jesu—Mercedes——"

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It was the end of as brave a lover, as true a cavalier as ever drew sword or pledged hand in a woman's cause.

"He is dead," said the officer.

"God rest his soul, a gallant gentleman," said the Viceroy, taking off his hat, and his example was followed by every one in the room.

"And Captain Alvarado?" said Mercedes, rising to her feet and turning to the other figure.

"Señorita," answered another of the officers, "he lives."

"Oh, God, I thank Thee!"

"See—he moves!"

A little shudder crept through the figure of the prostrate Captain, who had only been knocked senseless by the fierce blow and was otherwise unhurt.

"His eyes are open! Water, quick!"

With skilled fingers begot by long practice the cavalier cut the lacings of Alvarado's doublet and gave him water, then a little wine. As the young Captain returned to consciousness, once more the officers crowded around him, the Viceroy in the centre, Mercedes on her knees again.

"Mercedes," whispered the young Captain. "Alive—unharméd?"

"Yes," answered Mercedes brokenly, "thanks to God and thee."

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"And de Tobar," generously asserted Alvarado. "Where is he?"

"Dead."

"Oh, brave de Tobar! And the city——"

"Is ours."

"And Morgan?"

"Here in my hands," said the Viceroy sternly.

"Thank God, thank God! And now, your Excellency, my promise. I thought as I was stricken down there would be no need for you to——"

"Thou hast earned life, Alvarado, not death, and thou shalt have it."

"Señors," said Alvarado, whose faintness was passing from him, "I broke my plighted word to the Viceroy and Don Felipe de Tobar. I love this lady and was false to my charge. Don Alvaro promised me death for punishment, and I crave it. I care not for life without——"

"And did he tell thee why he broke his word?" asked Mercedes, taking his hands in her own and looking up at her father. "It was my fault. I made him. In despair I strove to throw myself over the cliff on yonder mountain and he caught me in his arms. With me in his arms—Which of you, my lords," she said, throwing back her head with superb pride, "would not have done the same? Don Felipe de Tobar is dead. He was a gallant gentleman, but I loved him not. My father, you will not part us now?"


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"No," said the old man, "I will not try. I care not now what his birth or lineage, he hath shown himself a man of noblest soul. You heard the wish of de Tobar. It shall be so. This is the betrothal of my daughter, gentlemen. Art satisfied, Captain? She is noble enough, she hath lineage and race enough for both of you. My interest with our royal master will secure you that patent of nobility you will adorn, for bravely have you won it."

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CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH SIR HENRY MORGAN SEES A CROSS, CHERISHES A HOPE, AND MAKES A CLAIM

hese noble and generous words of the Viceroy put such heart into the young Spanish soldier that, forgetting his wounds and his weakness, he rose to his feet. Indeed, the blow that struck him down had stunned him rather than anything else, and he would not have been put out of the combat so easily had it not been that he was exhausted by the hardships of those two terrible days through which he had just passed. The terrific mountain climb, the wild



ride, the fierce battle, his consuming anxiety for the woman he loved—these things had so wearied him that he had been unequal to the struggle. The stimulants which had been administered to him by his loving friends had been of great service also in reviving his strength, and he faced the Viceroy, his hand in that of Mercedes, with a flush of pleasure and pride upon his face.

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Yet, after all, it was the consciousness of having won permission to marry the woman whom he adored and who loved him with a passion that would fain overmatch his own, were that possible, that so quickly restored him to strength. With the realization of what he had gained there came to him such an access of vigor as amazed those who a few moments before had thought him dead or dying.

"But for these poor people who have so suffered, this, my lord," he exclaimed with eager gratitude and happiness, "hath been a happy day for me. Last night, sir, on the beach yonder, I found a mother. A good sister, she, of Holy Church, who, rather than carry the ladders which gave access to the town, with the fearful

alternative of dishonor as a penalty for refusal, killed herself with her own hand. She died not, praise God, before she had received absolution from a brave priest, although the holy father paid for his office with his life, for Morgan killed him. To-night I find, by the blessing of God, the favor of your Excellency and the kindness of the lady's heart—a wife."

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He dropped upon his knees as he spoke and pressed a long, passionate kiss upon the happy Mercedes' extended hand.

"Lady," he said, looking up at her, his soul in his eyes, his heart in his voice, "I shall strive to make myself noble for thee, and all that I am, and shall be, shall be laid at thy feet."

"I want not more than thyself, Señor Alvarado," answered the girl bravely before them all, her own cheeks aglow with happy color. "You have enough honor already. You satisfy me."

"Long life to Donna de Lara and Captain Alvarado!" cried old Agramonte, lifting up his hand. "The handsomest, the noblest, the bravest pair in New Spain! May they be the happiest! Give me leave, sir," added the veteran captain turning to the Viceroy. "You have done well. Say I not true, gentlemen? And as for the young captain, as he is fit to stand with the best, it is meet that he should win the heart of the loveliest. His mother he has found. None may know his father——"

"Let me be heard," growled a deep voice in broken Spanish, as the one-eyed old sailor thrust himself through the crowd.

"Hornigold, by hell!" screamed the bound buccaneer captain, who had been a silent spectator of events from the background. "I missed you. Have you——"

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The boatswain, mindful of his safety, for in the hurry and confusion of the attack any Spaniard would have cut him down before he could explain, had followed hard upon the heels of Alvarado and de Tobar when they entered the fort and had concealed himself in one of the inner rooms until he saw a convenient opportunity for disclosing himself. He had been a witness to all that had happened in the hall, and he realized that the time had now come to strike the first of the blows he had prepared against his old captain. That in the striking, he wrecked the life and happiness of those he had assisted for his own selfish purpose mattered little to him. He had so long brooded and thought upon one idea, so planned and schemed to bring about one thing, that a desire for revenge fairly obsessed him.

As soon as he appeared from behind the hangings where he had remained in hiding, it was evident to every one that he was a buccaneer. Swords were out in an instant.

"What's this?" cried the Viceroy in great surprise. "Another pirate free and unbound? Seize him!"

Three or four of the men made a rush toward the old buccaneer, but with wonderful agility he avoided them and sprang to the side of Alvarado.

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"Back, señors!" he cried coolly and composedly, facing their uplifted points.

"My lord," said Alvarado, "bid these gentlemen withdraw their weapons. This man is under my protection."

"Who is he?"

"He I told you of, sir, who set me free, provided Donna Mercedes with a weapon, opened the gate for us. One Benjamin Hornigold."

"Thou damned traitor!" yelled that fierce, high voice on the outskirts of the crowd.

There was a sudden commotion. A bound man burst through the surprised cavaliers and threw himself, all fettered though he was, upon the sailor. He was without weapon or use of hand, yet he bit him savagely on the cheek.

"Hell!" he cried, as they pulled him away and dragged him to his feet, "had I a free hand for a second you'd pay! As it is, I've marked you, and you'll carry the traitor's brand until you die!"

Curse you, whatever doom comes to me, may worse come to you!"

The old buccaneer was an awful figure, as he poured out a horrible torrent of curses and imprecations upon the traitor, grinding his teeth beneath his foam-flecked lips, and even the iron-hearted sailor, striving to staunch the blood, involuntarily shrank back appalled before him.

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"Señor," he cried, appealing to Alvarado, "I was to have protection!"

"You shall have it," answered the young soldier, himself shrinking away from the traitor, although by his treason he had so greatly benefited. "My lord, had it not been for this man, I'd still be a prisoner, the lady Mercedes like those wretched women weeping in the streets. I promised him, in your name, protection, immunity from punishment, and liberty to depart with as much of the treasure of the Porto Bello plate galleon, which was wrecked on the sands a few days ago, of which I told you, as he could carry."

"And you did not exceed your authority, Captain Alvarado. We condemn treason in whatsoever guise it doth appear, and we hate and loathe a traitor, but thy word is passed. It will be held inviolate as our own. You are free, knave. I will appoint soldiers to guard you, for should my men see you, not knowing this, they would cut you down; and when occasion serves you may take passage in the first ship that touches here and go where you will. Nay, we will be generous, although we like you not. We are much indebted to you. We have profited by what we do despise. We would reward you. Ask of me something that I may measure my obligation for a daughter's honor saved, if you can realize or feel what that may be."

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"My lord, hear me," said the boatswain quickly. "There be reasons and reasons for betrayals, and I have one. This man was my captain. I perilled my life a dozen times to save his; I followed him blindly upon a hundred terrible ventures; I lived but for his service. My soul—when I had a soul—was at his command; I loved him. Ay, gentlemen, rough, uncouth, old though I am, I loved this man. He could ask of me anything that I could have given him and he would not have been refused."

"Sirs, there came to me a young brother of mine, not such as I, a rude, unlettered sailor, but a gentleman—and college bred. There are quarterings on my family scutcheon, sirs, back in Merry England, had I the wit or care to trace it. He was a reckless youth, chafing under the restraints of that hard religion to which we had been born. The free life of a brother-of-the-coast attracted him. He became like me, a buccaneer. I strove to dissuade him, but without avail. He was the bravest, the handsomest, the most gallant of us all. He came into my old heart like a son. We are not all brute, gentlemen. I have waded in blood and plunder like the rest, but in every heart there is some spot that beats for things better. I divided my love between him and my captain. This man"—he pointed to his old master with his blunted finger, drawing himself up until he looked taller than he was, his one eye flashing with anger and hatred, as with a stern, rude eloquence he recited his wrongs, the grim indictment of a false friend—"this man betrayed us at Panama. With what he had robbed his comrades of he bought immunity, even knighthood, from the King of England. He was made Vice-Governor of Jamaica and his hand fell heavily upon those who had blindly followed him in the old days, men who had served him and trusted him, as I—men whose valor and courage had made him what he was."

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"He took the lad I loved, and because his proud spirit would not break to his heavy hand and he answered him like the bold, free sailor he was, he hanged him like a dog, sirs! I—I—stooped for his life. I, who cared not for myself, offered to stand in his place upon the gallows platform, though I have no more taste for the rope than any of you, if only he might go free. He laughed at me! He mocked me! I urged my ancient service—he drove me from him with curses and threats like a whipped dog. I could have struck him down then, but that I wanted to save him for a revenge that might measure my hate, slow and long and terrible. Not mere sudden death, that would not suffice. Something more."

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"Treachery? My lord, his was the first. I played his own game and have overcome it with the same. D'ye blame me now? Take your treasure! I want none of it. I want only him and my revenge! Liberty's dear to all of us. I'll give mine up. You may take my life with the rest, but first give me this man. Let me deal with him. I will revenge you all, and when I have finished with him I will yield myself to you."

He was a hideous figure of old hate and rancor, of unslaked passion, of monstrous possibilities of cruel torture. Hardened as they were by the customs of their age to hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, the listeners turned cold at such an exhibition of malefic passion, of consuming hatred. Even Morgan himself, intrepid as he was, shrank from the awful menace of the mordant words.

"My lord!" shouted the unfortunate captain, "give him no heed. He lies in his throat; he lies a thousand times. 'Twas a mutinous dog, that brother of his, that I hanged. I am your prisoner. You are a soldier. I look for speedy punishment, certain death it may be, but let it not be from his hand."

"Think, señors," urged the boatswain; "you would hang him perhaps. It is the worst that you could do. Is that punishment meet for him? He has despoiled women, bereft children, tortured men, in the streets of La Guayra. A more fitting punishment should await him. Think of Panama, of Maracaibo, of Porto Bello! Recall what he did there. Is hanging enough? Give him to me. Let me have my way. You have your daughter, safe, unharmed, within the shelter of her lover's arms. The town is yours. You have won the fight. 'Twas I that did it. Without me your wives, your

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children, your subjects, would have been slaughtered in Caracas and this dog would have been free to go further afield for prey. He coveted your daughter—would fain make her his slave in some desert island. Give him to me!"

"Old man," said the Viceroy, "I take back my words. You have excuse for your betrayal, but your request I can not grant. I have promised him to Alvarado. Nay, urge me no further. My word is passed."

"Thank you, thank you!" cried Morgan, breathing again.

"Silence, you dog!" said the Viceroy, with a look of contempt on his face. "But take heart, man," he added, as he saw the look of rage and disappointment sweep over the face of the old sailor, "he will not escape lightly. Would God he had blood enough in his body to pay drop by drop for all he hath shed. His death shall be slow, lingering, terrible. You have said it, and you shall see it, too, and you will. He shall have time to repent and to think upon the past. You may glut yourself with his suffering and feed fat your revenge. 'Twill be a meet, a fitting punishment so far as our poor minds can compass. We have already planned it."

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"You Spanish hounds!" roared Morgan stoutly, "I am a subject of England. I demand to be sent there for trial."

"You are an outlaw, sir, a man of no country, a foe to common humanity, and taken in your crimes. Silence, I say!" again cried the old man. "You pollute the air with your speech. Take him away and hold him safe. To-morrow he shall be punished."

"Without a trial?" screamed the old buccaneer, struggling forward.

"Thou art tried already. Thou hast been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Alvarado, art ready for duty?"

"Ready, your Excellency," answered the young man, "and for this duty."

"Take him then, I give him into your hands. You know what is to be done; see you do it well."

"Ay, my lord. Into the strong-room with him, men!" ordered the young Spaniard, stepping unsteadily forward.

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As he did so the crucifix he wore, which the disorder in his dress exposed to view, flashed into the light once more. Morgan's eyes fastened upon it for the first time.

"By heaven, sir!" he shouted. "Where got ye that cross?"

"From his mother, noble captain," interrupted Hornigold, coming closer.

He had another card to play. He had waited for this moment, and he threw back his head with a long, bitter laugh. There was such sinister, such vicious mockery and meaning in his voice, with not the faintest note of merriment to relieve it, that his listeners looked aghast upon him.

"His mother?" cried Morgan. "Then this is——"

He paused. The assembled cavaliers, Mercedes, and Alvarado stood with bated breath waiting for the terrible boatswain's answer.

"The boy I took into Cuchillo when we were at Panama," said Hornigold in triumph.

"And my son!" cried the old buccaneer with malignant joy.

A great cry of repudiation and horror burst from the lips of Alvarado. The others stared with astonishment and incredulity written on their faces. Mercedes moved closer to her lover and strove to take his hand.

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"My lords and gentlemen, hear me," continued the buccaneer, the words rushing from his lips in his excitement, for in the new relationship he so promptly and boldly affirmed, he thought he saw a way of escape from his imminent peril. "There lived in Maracaibo a Spanish woman, Maria Zerega, who loved me. By her there was a child—mine—a boy. I took them with me to Panama. The pestilence raged there after the sack. She fell ill, and as she lay dying besought me to save the boy. I sent Hornigold to her with instructions to do her will, and he carried the baby to the village of Cuchillo with that cross upon his breast and left him. We lost sight of him. There, the next day, you found him. He has English blood in his veins. He is my son, sirs, a noble youth," sneered the old man. "Now you have given me to him. 'Tis not meet that the father should suffer at the hands of the son. You shall set me free," added the man, turning to Alvarado.

"Rather than that—" cried Hornigold, viciously springing forward knife in hand.

He was greatly surprised at the bold yet cunning appeal of his former captain.

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"Back, man!" interposed the Viceroy. "And were you a thousand times his father, were you my brother, my own father, you should, nevertheless, die, as it hath been appointed."

"Can this be true?" groaned Alvarado, turning savagely to Hornigold.

"I believe it to be."

"Why not kill me last night then?"

"I wanted you for this minute. 'Tis a small part of my revenge. To see him die and by his son's hand—A worthy father, noble son——"

"Silence!" shouted de Lara. "Art thou without bowels of compassion, man! Alvarado, I pity thee, but this makes the promise of the hour void. Nay, my daughter"—as Mercedes came forward to entreat him—"I'd rather slay thee with my own hand than wed thee to the son of such as you!"

"My lord, 'tis just," answered Alvarado. His anguish was pitiful to behold. "I am as innocent of my parentage as any child, yet the suffering must be mine. The sins of the fathers are visited on the children. I did deem it yesterday a coward's act to cut the thread of my life but now—I cannot survive—I cannot live—and know that in my veins—runs the blood of such a monster. My lord, you have been good to me. Gentlemen, you have honored me. Mercedes, you have loved me—O God! You, infamous man, you have fathered me. May the curse of God, that God whom you mock, rest upon you! My mother loved this man once, it seems. Well, nobly did she expiate. I go to join her. Pray for me. Stay not my hand. Farewell!"

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He raised his poniard.

"Let no one stop him," cried the old Viceroy as Alvarado darted the weapon straight at his own heart. "This were the best end."

Mercedes had stood dazed during this conversation, but with a shriek of horror, as she saw the flash of the blade, she threw herself upon her lover, and strove to wrench the dagger from him.

"Alvarado!" she cried, "whatever thou art, thou hast my heart! Nay, slay me first, if thou wilt."

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CHAPTER XXIII

HOW THE GOOD PRIEST FRA ANTONIO DE LAS CASAS TOLD THE TRUTH, TO THE GREAT RELIEF OF CAPTAIN ALVARADO AND DONNA MERCEDES, AND THE DISCOMFITURE OF MASTER BENJAMIN HORNIGOLD AND SIR HENRY MORGAN

Ay, strike, Alvarado," cried the Viceroy, filled with shame and surprise at the sight of his daughter's extraordinary boldness, "for though I love her, I'd rather see her dead than married to the son of such as he. Drive home your weapon!" he cried in bitter scorn. "Why stay your hand? Only blood can wash out the shame she hath put upon me before you all this day. Thou hast a dagger. Use it, I say!"



"Do you hear my father's words, Alvarado?" cried Mercedes sinking on her knees and stretching up her hands to him. "'Tis a sharp weapon. One touch will end it all, and you can follow."

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"God help me!" cried the unhappy young Captain, throwing aside the poniard and clasping his hands to his eyes. "I cannot! Hath no one here a point for me? If I have deserved well of you or the State, sir, bid them strike home."

"Live, young sir," interrupted Morgan, "there are other women in the world. Come with me and——"

"If you are my father, you have but little time in this world," interrupted the Spaniard, turning to Morgan and gnashing his teeth at him. "I doubt not but you were cruel to my mother. I hate you! I loathe you! I despise you for all your crimes! And most of all

for bringing me into the world. I swear to you, had I the power, I'd not add another moment to your life. The world were better rid of you."

"You have been well trained by your Spanish nurses," cried Morgan resolutely, although with sneering mockery and hate in his voice, "and well you seem to know the duty owed by son to sire."

"You have done nothing for me," returned the young soldier, "you abandoned me. Such as you are you were my father. You cast me away to shift for myself. Had it not been for these friends here ____"

"Nay," said Morgan, "I thought you dead. That cursed one-eyed traitor there told me so, else I'd sought you out."

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"God help me!" cried Alvarado, throwing aside the poniard, "I cannot!"

"Glad am I that you did not, for I have passed my life where no child of yours could hope to be—among honorable men, winning their respect, which I now forfeit because of thee."

"Alvarado," said the Viceroy, "this much will I do for thee. He shall be shot like a soldier instead of undergoing the punishment we had designed for him. This much for his fatherhood."

"My lord, I ask it not," answered the young man.

"Sir," exclaimed Morgan, a gleam of relief passing across his features, for he knew, of course, that death was his only expectation, and he had greatly feared that his taking off would be accompanied by the most horrible tortures that could be devised by people who were not the least expert in the practice of the unmentionable cruelties of the age, "you, at least, are a father, and I thank you."

"Yes, I am a father and a most unhappy one," groaned de Lara, turning toward Alvarado. "Perhaps it is well you did not accomplish your purpose of self-destruction after all, my poor friend. As I said before, Spain hath need of you. You may go back to the old country beyond the great sea. All here will keep your secret; my favor will be of service to you even there. You can make a new career with a new name."

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"And Mercedes?" asked Alvarado.

"You have no longer any right to question. Ah, well, it is just that you should hear. The girl goes to a convent; the only cloak for her is in our Holy Religion—and so ends the great race of de Laras!"

"No, no," pleaded Mercedes, "send me not there! Let me go with him!" She stepped nearer to him, beautiful and beseeching. "My father," she urged, "you love me." She threw her arms around his neck and laid her head upon his breast. Upon it her father tenderly pressed his hand. "You loved my mother, did you not?" she continued. "Think of her. Condemn me not to the living death of a convent—away from him. If that man be his father—and I can not believe it, there is some mistake, 'tis impossible that anything so foul should bring into the world a man so noble—yet I love him! You know him. You have tried him a thousand times. He has no qualities of his base ancestry. His mother at least died like a Spanish gentlewoman. My lords, gentlemen, some of you have known me from my childhood. You have lived in our house and have followed the fortunes of my father—you have grown gray in our service. Intercede for me!"

"Your Excellency," said old Don Cæsar de Agramonte, a man, who, as Mercedes had said, had literally grown gray in the service of the Viceroy, and who was man of birth scarcely inferior to his own, "the words of the Lady Mercedes move me profoundly. By your grace's leave, I venture to say that she hath spoken well and nobly, and that the young Alvarado, whom we have seen in places that try men's souls to the extreme, hath always comported himself as a Spanish gentleman should. This may be a lie. But if it is true, his old association with you and yours, and

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some humor of courage and fidelity and gentleness that I doubt not his mother gave him, have washed out the taint. Will you not reconsider your words? Give the maiden to the man. I am an old soldier, sir, and have done you some service. I would cheerfully stake my life to maintain his honor and his gentleness at the sword's point."

"He speaks well, Don Alvaro," cried Captain Gayoso, another veteran soldier. "I join my plea to that of my comrade, Don Cæsar."

"And I add my word, sir."

"And I, mine."

"And I, too," came from the other men of the suite.

"Gentlemen, I thank you," said Alvarado, gratefully looking at the little group; "this is one sweet use of my adversity. I knew not I was so befriended——" [Pg 391]

"You hear, you hear, my father, what these noble gentlemen say?" interrupted Mercedes.

"But," continued Alvarado sadly, "it is not meet that the blood of the princely de Laras should be mingled with mine. Rather the ancient house should fall with all its honors upon it than be kept alive by degradation. I thank you, but it can not be."

"Your Excellency, we humbly press you for an answer," persisted Agramonte.

"Gentlemen—and you have indeed proven yourselves generous and gentle soldiers—I appreciate what you say. Your words touch me profoundly. I know how you feel, but Alvarado is right. I swear to you that I would rather let my line perish than keep it in existence by such means. Rather anything than that my daughter should marry—forgive me, lad—the bastard son of a pirate and buccaneer, a wicked monster, like that man!"

"Sir," exclaimed a thin, faint old voice from the outskirts of the room, "no base blood runs in the veins of that young man. You are all mistaken."

"Death and fury!" shouted Morgan, who was nearer to him, "it is the priest! Art alive? Scuttle me, I struck you down—I do not usually need to give a second blow." [Pg 392]

"Who is this?" asked de Lara. "Back, gentlemen, and give him access to our person."

The excited men made way for a tall, pale, gaunt figure of a man clad in the habit of a Dominican. As he crossed his thin hands on his breast and bowed low before the Viceroy, the men marked a deeply scarred wound upon his shaven crown, a wound recently made, for it was still raw and open. The man tottered as he stood there.

"'Tis the priest!" exclaimed Hornigold, who had been a silent and disappointed spectator of the scene at last. "He lives then?"

"The good father!" said Mercedes, stepping from her father's side and scanning the man eagerly. "He faints! A chair for him, gentlemen, and wine!"

"Now, sir," said the Viceroy as the priest seated himself on a stool which willing hands had placed for him, after he had partaken of a generous draught of wine, which greatly refreshed him, "your name?"

"Fra Antonio de Las Casas, your Excellency, a Dominican, from Peru, bound for Spain on the plate galleon, the *Almirante Recalde*, captured by that man. I was stricken down by his blow as I administered absolution to the mother of the young captain. I recovered and crawled into the woods for concealment, and when I saw your soldiers, your Excellency, I followed, but slowly, for I am an old man and sore wounded." [Pg 393]

"Would that my blow had bit deeper, thou false priest!" roared Morgan in furious rage.

"Be still!" commanded the old Viceroy sternly. "Speak but another word until I give you leave and I'll have you gagged! You said strange words, Holy Father, when you came into the hall."

"I did, my lord."

"You heard——"

"Some of the conversation, sir, from which I gathered that this unfortunate man"—pointing to Morgan, who as one of the chief actors in the transaction had been placed in the front rank of the circle, although tightly bound and guarded by the grim soldiers—"claimed to be the father of the brave young soldier."

"Ay, and he hath established the claim," answered de Lara.

"Nay, my lord, that can not be."

"Why not, sir," interrupted Alvarado, stepping forward.

"Because it is not true."

"Thank God, thank God!" cried Alvarado. Indeed, he almost shouted in his relief.

"How know you this?" asked Mercedes. [Pg 394]

"My lady, gentles all, I have proof irrefutable. He is not the child of that wicked man. His father is ___"

"I care not who," cried Alvarado, having passed from death unto life in the tremendous moments, "even though he were the meanest and poorest peasant, so he were an honest man."

"My lord," said the priest, "he was a noble gentleman."

"I knew it, I knew it!" cried Mercedes. "I said it must be so."

"Ay, a gentleman, a gentleman!" burst from the officers in the room.

"Your Excellency," continued the old man, turning to the Viceroy. "His blood is as noble as your own."

"His name?" said the old man, who had stood unmoved in the midst of the tumult.

"Captain Alvarado that was," cried the Dominican, with an inborn love of the dramatic in his tones, "stand forth. My lord and lady, and gentles all, I present to you Don Francisco de Guzman, the son of his excellency, the former Governor of Panama and of his wife, Isabella Zerega, a noble and virtuous lady, though of humbler walk of life and circumstance than her husband."

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"De Guzman! De Guzman!" burst forth from the soldiers.

"It is a lie!" shouted Hornigold. "He is Morgan's son. He was given to me as such. I left him at Cuchillo. You found him, sir—"

He appealed to the Viceroy.

"My venerable father, with due respect to you, sir, we require something more than your unsupported statement to establish so great a fact," said the Viceroy deliberately, although the sparkle in his eyes belied his calm.

"Your grace speaks well," said Morgan, clutching at his hope still.

"I require nothing more. I see and believe," interrupted Mercedes.

"But I want proof," sternly said her father.

"And you shall have it," answered the priest. "That cross he wears—"

"As I am about to die!" exclaimed Morgan, "I saw his mother wear it many a time, and she put it upon his breast."

"Not this one, sir," said Fra Antonio, "but its fellow. There were two sisters in the family of Zerega. There were two crosses made, one for each. In an evil hour the elder sister married you ___"

"We did, indeed, go through some mockery of a ceremony," muttered Morgan.

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"You did, sir, and 'twas a legal one, for when you won her—by what means I know not, in Maracaibo—you married her. You were forced to do so before you received her consent. One of my brethren who performed the service told me the tale. After you took her away from Maracaibo her old father, broken hearted at her defection, sought asylum in Panama with the remaining daughter, and there she met the Governor, Don Francisco de Guzman. He loved her, he wooed and won her, and at last he married her, but secretly. She was poor and humble by comparison with him; she had only her beauty and her virtue for her dower, and there were reasons why it were better the marriage should be concealed for a while.

"A child was born. You were that child, sir. Thither came this man with his bloody marauders. In his train was his wretched wife and her own boy, an infant, born but a short time before that of the Governor. De Guzman sallied out to meet them and was killed at the head of his troops. They burned Panama and turned that beautiful city into a hell like unto La Guayra. I found means to secrete Isabella de Guzman and her child. The plague raged in the town. This man's wife died. He gave command to Hornigold to take the child away. He consulted me, as a priest whose life he had spared, as to what were best to do with him, and I advised Cuchillo, but his child died with its mother before it could be taken away.

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"Isabella de Guzman was ill. I deemed it wise to send her infant away. I urged her to substitute her child for the dead body of the other, intending to provide for its reception at Cuchillo, and she gave her child to the sailor. In the confusion and terror it must have been abandoned by the woman to whom it was delivered; she, it was supposed, perished when the buccaneers destroyed the place out of sheer wantonness when they left Panama. I fell sick of the fever shortly after and knew not what happened. The poor mother was too seriously ill to do anything. It was months ere we recovered and could make inquiries for the child, and then it had disappeared and we found no trace of it. You, sir," pointing to Hornigold, "had gone away with the rest. There was none to tell us anything. We never heard of it again and supposed it dead."

"And my child, sir priest?" cried Morgan. "What became of it?"

"I buried it in the same grave with its poor mother with the cross on its breast. May God have mercy on their souls!"

"A pretty tale, indeed," sneered the buccaneer.

"It accounts in some measure for the situation," said the Viceroy, "but I must have further proof."

"Patience, noble sir, and you shall have it. These crosses were of cunning construction. They open to those who know the secret. There is room in each for a small writing. Each maiden, so they told me, put within her own cross her marriage lines. If this cross hath not been tampered with it should bear within its recess the attestation of the wedding of Francisco de Guzman and Isabella Zerega."

"The cross hath never left my person," said Alvarado, "since I can remember."

"And I can bear testimony," said the Viceroy, "that he hath worn it constantly since a child. Though it was large and heavy I had a superstition that it should never leave his person. Know you the secret of the cross?"

"I do, for it was shown me by the woman herself."

"Step nearer, Alvarado," said de Lara.

"Nay, sir," said the aged priest, as Alvarado came nearer him and made to take the cross from his breast, "thou hast worn it ever there. Wear it to the end. I can open it as thou standest."

He reached up to the carven cross depending from the breast of the young man bending over him.

"A pretty story," sneered Morgan again, "but had I aught to wager, I'd offer it with heavy odds that that cross holds the marriage lines of my wife." [Pg 399]

"Thou wouldst lose, sir, for see, gentlemen," cried the priest, manipulating the crucifix with his long, slender fingers and finally opening it, "the opening! And here is a bit of parchment! Read it, sir."

He handed it to the Viceroy. The old noble, lifting it to the light, scanned the closely-written, faded lines on the tiny scrap of delicate parchment.

"'Tis a certificate of marriage of——" He paused.

"Maria Zerega," said Morgan, triumphantly.

"Nay," answered the old man, and his triumph rung in his voice, "of Isabella Zerega and Francisco de Guzman."

"Hell and fury!" shouted the buccaneer, "'tis a trick!"

"And signed by——"

He stopped again, peering at the faded, almost illegible signature.

"By whom, your Excellency?" interrupted the priest smiling.

"'Tis a bit faded," said the old man, holding it nearer. "Fra—An—tonio! Was it thou?"

"Even so, sir. I married the mother, as I buried her yester eve upon the sand." [Pg 400]

"'Tis a fact established," said the Viceroy, satisfied at last. "Don Francisco de Guzman, Alvarado that was, thy birth and legitimacy are clear and undoubted. There by your side stands the woman you have loved. If you wish her now I shall be honored to call you my son."

"My lord," answered Alvarado, "that I am the son of an honorable gentleman were joy enough, but when thou givest me Donna Mercedes——"

He turned, and with a low cry the girl fled to his arms. He drew her close to him and laid his hand upon her head, and then he kissed her before the assembled cavaliers, who broke into enthusiastic shouts and cries of happy approbation.

"There's more evidence yet," cried the priest, thrusting his hand into the bosom of his habit and drawing forth a glittering object. "Sir, I took this from the body of Sister Maria Christina, for upon my advice she entered upon the service of the Holy Church after her bereavement, keeping her secret, for there was naught to be gained by its publication. That Church she served long and well. Many sufferers there be to whom she ministered who will rise up and call her blessed. She killed herself upon the sands rather than give aid and comfort to this man and his men, or submit herself to the evil desires of his band. Sirs, I have lived long and suffered much, and done some little service for Christ, His Church, and His children, but I take more comfort from the absolution that I gave her when she cried for mercy against the sin of self-slaughter than for any other act in my career. Here, young sir," said the priest, opening the locket, "are the pictures of your father and mother. See, cavaliers, some of you knew Don Francisco de Guzman and can recognize him. That is his wife. She was young and had golden hair like thine, my son, in those days. You are the express image of her person as I recall it." [Pg 401]

"My father! My mother!" cried Alvarado. "Look, Mercedes, look your Excellency, and gentlemen, all! But her body, worthy father?"

"Even as her soul hath gone out into the new life beyond, her body was drawn out into the great

deep at the call of God—but not unblest, señors, even as she went not unshriven, for I knelt alone by her side, unable by my wounds and weakness to do more service, and said the office of our Holy Church."

"May God bless thee, as I bless thee!" answered Alvarado, to give him the familiar name.

As he spoke he sank on his knees and pressed a long and fervent kiss upon the worn and withered hand of the aged man.

"It is not meet," said the priest, withdrawing his hand and laying it in blessing upon the bowed fair head. "That which was lost is found again. Let us rejoice and praise God for His mercy. Donna Mercedes, gentlemen, my blessing on Señor de Guzman and upon ye all. Benedicite!" he said, making the sign of the cross.

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CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH SIR HENRY MORGAN APPEALS UNAVAILINGLY ALIKE TO THE PITY OF WOMAN, THE FORGIVENESS OF PRIEST, THE FRIENDSHIP OF COMRADE, AND THE HATRED OF MEN

And bless me also, my father," cried Mercedes, kneeling by Alvarado's side.

"Most willingly, my fair daughter," answered the old man. "A fit helpmate indeed thou hast shown thyself for so brave a soldier. By your leave, your Excellency. You will indulge an old man's desire to bless the marriage of the son as he did that of the mother? No obstacle, I take it, now exists to prevent this most happy union."

"None," answered the Viceroy, as the young people rose and stood before him, "and glad I am that this happy solution of our difficulties has come to pass."

"And when, sir," questioned the priest further, "may I ask that you design—"

"The sooner the better," said the Viceroy smiling grimly. "By the mass, reverend father, I'll feel easier when he hath her in his charge!"

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"I shall prove as obedient to thee as wife, Don Francisco—" said Mercedes with great spirit, turning to him.

"Nay, call me Alvarado, sweet lady," interrupted her lover.

"Alvarado then, if you wish—for it was under that name that I first loved thee—I shall prove as obedient a wife to thee as I was a dutiful daughter to thee, my father."

"'Tis not saying o'er much," commented the Viceroy, but smiling more kindly as he said the words. "Nay, I'll take that back, Mercedes, or modify it. Thou hast, indeed, been to me all that a father could ask, until—"

"'Twas my fault, your Excellency. On me be the punishment," interrupted the lover.

"Thou shalt have it with Mercedes," answered the Viceroy, laughing broadly now. "What say ye, gentlemen?"

"My lord," said Agramonte, from his age and rank assuming to speak for the rest, "there is not one of us who would not give all he possessed to stand in the young Lord de Guzman's place."

"Well, well," continued the old man, "when we have restored order in the town we shall have a wedding ceremony—say to-morrow."

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"Ay, ay, to-morrow, to-morrow!" cried the cavaliers.

"Your Excellency, there is one more thing yet to be done," said Alvarado as soon as he could be heard.

"Art ever making objections, Captain Alvarado—Don Francisco, that is. We might think you had reluctance to the bridal," exclaimed the Viceroy in some little surprise. "What is it now?"

"The punishment of this man."

"I gave him into your hands."

"By God!" shouted old Hornigold, "I wondered if in all this fathering and mothering and sweethearting and giving in marriage he had forgot—"

"Not so. The postponement but makes it deeper," answered Alvarado gravely. "Rest satisfied."

"And I shall have my revenge in full measure?"

"In full, in overflowing measure, señor."

"Do you propose to shoot me?" asked the buccaneer chieftain coolly. "Or behead me?"

"That were a death for an honorable soldier taken in arms and forced to bide the consequences of his defeat. It is not meet for you," answered Alvarado.

"What then? You'll not hang me? Me! A knight of England! Sometime Governor of Jamaica!"

"These titles are nothing to me. And hanging is the death we visit upon the common criminal, a man who murders or steals, or blasphemes. Your following may expect that. For you there is——" [Pg 406]

"You don't mean to burn me alive, do you?"

"Were you simply a heretic that might be meet, but you are worse——"

"What do you mean?" cried the buccaneer, carried away by the cold-blooded menace in Alvarado's words. "Neither lead, nor steel, nor rope, nor fire!"

"Neither one nor the other, sir."

"Is it the wheel? The rack? The thumbscrew? Sink me, ye shall see how an Englishman can die! Even from these I flinch not."

"Nor need you, from these, for none of them shall be used," continued the young soldier, with such calculating ferocity in his voice that in spite of his dauntless courage and intrepidity the blood of Morgan froze within his veins.

"Death and destruction!" he shouted. "What is there left?"

"You shall die, señor, not so much by the hand of man as by the act of God."

"God! I believe in none. There is no God!"

"That you shall see."

"Your Excellency, my lords! I appeal to you to save me from this man, not my son but my nephew ___" [Pg 407]

"S'death, sirrah!" shouted the Viceroy, enraged beyond measure by the allusion to any relationship, "not a drop of your base blood pollutes his veins. I have given you over to him. He will attend to you."

"What means he to do then?"

"You shall see."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

The sombre, sinister, although unknown purpose of the Spaniards had new terrors lent to it by the utter inability of the buccaneer to foresee what was to be his punishment. He was a man of the highest courage, the stoutest heart, yet in that hour he was astonished. His knees smote together; he clenched his teeth in a vain effort to prevent their chattering. All his devilry, his assurance, his fortitude, his strength, seemed to leave him. He stood before them suddenly an old, a broken man, facing a doom portentous and terrible, without a spark of strength or resolution left to meet it, whatever it might be. And for the first time in his life he played the craven, the coward. He moistened his dry lips and looked eagerly from one face to another in the dark and gloomy ring that encircled him. [Pg 408]

"Lady," he said at last, turning to Mercedes as the most likely of his enemies to befriend him, "you are a woman. You should be tender hearted. You don't want to see an old man, old enough to be your father, suffer some unknown, awful torture? Plead for me! Ask your lover. He will refuse you nothing now."

There was a dead silence in the room. Mercedes stared at the miserable wretch making his despairing appeal as if she were fascinated.

"Answer him," said her stern old father, "as a Spanish gentlewoman should."

It was a grim and terrible age. The gospel under which all lived in those days was not that of the present. It was a gospel writ in blood, and fire, and steel.

"An eye for an eye," said the girl slowly, "a tooth for a tooth, life for life, shame for shame," her voice rising until it rang through the room. "In the name of my ruined sisters, whose wails come to us this instant from without, borne hither on the night wind, I refuse to intercede for you, monster. For myself, the insults you have put upon me, I might forgive, but not the rest. The taking of one life like yours can not repay."

"You hear?" cried Alvarado. "Take him away." [Pg 409]

"One moment," cried Morgan. "Holy Father—your religion—it teaches to forgive they say. Intercede for me!"

His eyes turned with faint hope toward the aged priest.

"Not for such as thou," answered the old man looking from him. "I could forgive this," he touched his battered tonsure, "and all thou hast done against me and mine. That is not little, for when I was a lad, a youth, before I took the priestly yoke upon me, I loved Maria Zerega—but that is nothing. What suffering comes upon me I can bear, but thou hast filled the cup of iniquity and must drain it to the dregs. Hark ye—the weeping of the desolated town! I can not interfere! They

that take the sword shall perish by it. It is so decreed. You believe not in God——"

"I will! I do!" cried the buccaneer, clutching at the hope.

"I shall pray for thee, that is all."

"Hornigold," cried the now almost frenzied man, his voice hoarse with terror and weakness, "they owe much to you. Without you they had not been here. I have wronged you grievously—terribly—but I atone by this. Beg them, not to let me go but only to kill me where I stand! They will not refuse you. Had it not been for you this man would not have known his father. He could not have won this woman. You have power. You'll not desert an old comrade in his extremity? Think, we have stood together sword in hand and fought our way through all obstacles in many a desperate strait. Thou and I, old shipmate. By the memory of that old association, by the love you once bore me, and by that I gave to you, ask them for my death, here—now—at once!"

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"You ask for grace from me!" snarled Hornigold savagely, yet triumphant. "You—you hanged my brother——"

"I know, I know! 'Twas a grievous error. I shall be punished for all—ask them to shoot me—hang me——"

He slipped to his knees, threw himself upon the floor, and lay grovelling at Hornigold's feet.

"Don't let them torture me, man! My God, what is it they intend to do to me?"

"Beg, you hound!" cried the boatswain, spurning him with his foot. "I have you where I swore I'd bring you. And, remember, 'tis I that laid you low—I—I—" He shrieked like a maniac. "When you suffer in that living death for which they design you, remember with every lingering breath of anguish that it was I who brought you there! You trifled with me—mocked me—betrayed me. You denied my request. I grovelled at your feet and begged you—you spurned me as I do you now. Curse you! I'll ask no mercy for you!"

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"My lord," gasped out Morgan, turning to the Viceroy in one final appeal, as two of the men dragged him to his feet again, "I have treasure. The galleon we captured—it is buried—I can lead you there."

"There is not a man of your following," said the Viceroy, "who would not gladly purchase life by the same means."

"And 'tis not needed," said the boatswain, "for I have told them where it lies."

"If Teach were here," said Morgan, "he would stand by me."

A man forced his way into the circle carrying a sack in his hand. Drawing the strings he threw the contents at the feet of the buccaneer, and there rolled before him the severed head of the only man save Black Dog upon whom he could have depended, his solitary friend.

Morgan staggered back in horror from the ghastly object, staring at it as if fascinated.



... he threw the contents at the feet of the buccaneer, and there rolled before him the severed head of ... his solitary friend.

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho!" laughed the old boatswain. "What was it that he sang? 'We'll be damnably mouldy'—ay, even you and I captain—'an hundred years hence.' But should you live so long, you'll not forget 'twas I."

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"You didn't betray me then, my young comrade," whispered Morgan, looking down at the severed head. "You fought until you were killed. Would that my head might lie by your side."

He had been grovelling, pleading, weeping, beseeching, but the utter uselessness of it at last came upon him and some of his courage returned. He faced them once more with head uplifted.

"At your will, I'm ready," he cried. "I defy you! You shall see how Harry Morgan can die. Scuttle me, I'll not give way again!"

"Take him away," said Alvarado; "we'll attend to him in the morning."

"Wait! Give me leave, since I am now tried and condemned, to say a word."

A cunning plan had flashed into the mind of Morgan, and he resolved to put it in execution.

"It has been a long life, mine, and a merry one. There's more blood upon my hands—Spanish blood, gentlemen—than upon those of any other human being. There was Puerto Principe. Were any of you there? The men ran like dogs before me there and left the women and children. I wiped my feet upon your accursed Spanish flag. I washed the blood from my hands with hair torn from the heads of your wives, your sweethearts, and you had not courage to defend them!"

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A low murmur of rage swept through the room.

"But that's not all. Some of you perhaps were at Porto Bello. I drove the women of the convents to the attack, as in this city yesterday. When I finished I burned the town—it made a hot fire. I did it—I—who stand here! I and that cursed one-eyed traitor Hornigold, there!"

The room was in a tumult now. Shouts, and curses, and imprecations broke forth. Weapons were bared, raised, and shaken at him. The buccaneer laughed and sneered, ineffable contempt pictured on his face.

"And some of you were at Santa Clara, at Chagres, and here in Venezuela at Maracaibo, where we sunk the ships and burned your men up like rats. Then, there was Panama. We left the men to starve and die. Your mother, Señor Agramonte—what became of her? Your sister, there! Your wife, here! The sister of your mother, you young dog—what became of them all? Hell was let loose in this town yesterday. Panama was worse than La Guayra. I did it—I—Harry Morgan's way!"

He thrust himself into the very faces of the men, and with cries of rage they rushed upon him. They brushed aside the old Viceroy, drowning his commands with their shouts. Had it not been for the interference of Hornigold and Alvarado they would have cut Morgan to pieces where he stood. And this had been his aim—to provoke them beyond measure by a recital of some of his crimes so that he would be killed in their fury. But the old boatswain with superhuman strength seized the bound captain and forced him into a corner behind a table, while Alvarado with lightning resolution beat down the menacing sword points.

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"Back!" he cried. "Do you not see he wished to provoke this to escape just punishment? I would have silenced him instantly but I thought ye could control yourselves. I let him rave on that he might be condemned out of his own mouth, that none could have doubt that he merits death at our hands to-morrow. Sheath your weapons instantly, gentlemen!" he cried.

"Ay," said the Viceroy, stepping into the crowd and endeavoring to make himself heard, "under pain of my displeasure. What, soldiers, nobles, do ye turn executioners in this way?"

"My mother——"

"My sister——"

"The women and children——"

"The insult to the flag——"

"The disgrace to the Spanish name!"

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"That he should say these things and live!"

"Peace, sirs, he will not say words like these to-morrow. Now, we have had enough. See!" cried the old Viceroy, pointing to the windows, "the day breaks. Take him away. Agramonte, to you I commit the fort. Mercedes, Alvarado, come with me. Those who have no duties to perform, go get some sleep. As for you, prisoner, if you have preparation to make, do so at once, for in the morning you shall have no opportunity."

"I am ready now!" cried Morgan recklessly, furious because he had been balked in his attempt. "Do with me as you will! I have had my day, and it has been a long and merry one."

"And I mine, to-night. It has been short, but enough," laughed Hornigold, his voice ringing like a maniac's in the hall. "For I have had my revenge!"

"We shall take care of that in the morning," said Alvarado, turning away to follow the Viceroy and Mercedes.

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BOOK VI

IN WHICH THE CAREER OF SIR HENRY MORGAN IS ENDED ON ISLA DE LA TORTUGA, TO THE GREAT DELECTATION OF MASTER BENJAMIN HORNIGOLD, HIS SOMETIME FRIEND

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CHAPTER XXV

AND LAST. WHEREIN IS SEEN HOW THE JUDGMENT OF GOD CAME UPON THE BUCCANEERS IN THE END

Before it was submerged by the great earthquake which so tremendously overwhelmed the shores of South America with appalling disaster nearly a century and a half later, a great arid rock on an encircling stretch of sandy beach—resultant of untold centuries of struggle between stone and sea—thrust itself above the waters a few miles northward of the coast of Venezuela. The cay was barren and devoid of any sort of life except for a single clump of bushes that had sprung up a short distance from the huge rock upon a little plateau sufficiently elevated to resist the attacks of the sea, which at high tide completely overflowed the islet except at that one spot.

Four heavy iron staples had been driven with great difficulty into holes drilled in the face of the volcanic rock. To these four large chains had been made fast. The four chains ended in four fetters and the four fetters enclosed the ankles and wrists of a man. The length of the four chains had been so cunningly calculated that the arms and legs of the man were drawn far apart, so that he resembled a gigantic white cross against the dark surface of the stone. A sailor would have described his position by saying that he had been "spread-eagled" by those who had fastened him there. Yet the chains were not too short to allow a little freedom of motion. He could incline to one side or to the other, lift himself up or down a little, or even thrust himself slightly away from the face of the rock.

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The man was in tatters, for his clothing had been rent and torn by the violent struggles he had

made before he had been securely fastened in his chains. He was an old man, and his long gray hair fell on either side of his lean, fierce face in tangled masses. A strange terror of death—the certain fate that menaced him, was upon his countenance. He had borne himself bravely enough except for a few craven moments, while in the presence of his captors and judges, chief among whom had been the young Spanish soldier and the one-eyed sailor whom he had known for so many years. With the bravado of despair he had looked with seeming indifference on the sufferings of his own men that same morning. After being submitted to the tortures of the rack, the boot, the thumbscrew, or the wheel, in accordance with the fancy of their relentless captors, they had been hanged to the outer walls and he had been forced to pass by them on his way to this hellish spot. But the real courage of the man was gone now. His simulation had not even been good enough to deceive his enemies, and now even that had left him.

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He was alone, so he believed, upon the island, and all of the mortal fear slowly creeping upon him already appeared in his awful face, clearly exhibited by the light of the setting sun streaming upon his left hand for he was chained facing northward, that is, seaward. As he fancied himself the only living thing upon that island he took little care to conceal his emotions—indeed, it was impossible for him any longer to keep up the pretence of indifference. His nerves were shattered, his spirit broken. Retribution was dogging him hard. Vengeance was close at hand at last. Besides, what mattered it? He thought himself alone, absolutely alone. But in that fancy he was wrong, for in the solitary little cove of bushes of which mention has been made there lay hidden a man—an ancient sailor. His single eye gleamed as fiercely upon the bound, shackled prisoner as did the setting sun itself.

Old Benjamin Hornigold, who had schemed and planned for his revenge, had insisted upon being put ashore on the other side of the island after the boats had rowed out of sight of the captive, that he might steal back and, himself unseen, watch the torture of the man who had betrayed him and wronged him so deeply that in his diseased mind no expiation could be too awful for the crime; that he might glut his fierce old soul with the sight for which it had longed since the day Harry Morgan, beholden to him as he was for his very life and fortune, for a thousand brave and faithful, if nefarious, services, had driven him like a dog from his presence. Alvarado—who, being a Spaniard, could sympathize and understand the old sailor's lust for revenge—had readily complied with his request, and had further promised to return for the boatswain in two days. They calculated nicely that the already exhausted prisoner would scarcely survive that long, and provisions and water ample for that period had been left for the sustenance of Hornigold—alone.

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Morgan, however, did not know this. He believed his only companions to be the body of the half-breed who had died for him as he had lived for him, and the severed head of a newer comrade who had not betrayed him. The body lay almost at his feet; the head had been wedged in the sand so that its sightless face was turned toward him in the dreadful, lidless staring gaze of sudden death. And those two were companions with whom he could better have dispensed, even in his solitude.

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They had said to the buccaneer, as they fastened him to the rocks, that they would not take his life, but that he would be left to the judgment of God. What would that be? He thought he knew.

He had lived long enough on the Caribbean to know the habits of that beautiful and cruel sea. There was a little stretch of sand at his feet and then the water began. He estimated that the tide had been ebbing for an hour or so when he was fastened up and abandoned. The rock to which he had been chained was still wet, and he noticed that the dampness existed far above his head. The water would recede—and recede—and recede—until perhaps some three hundred feet of bare sand would stretch before him, and then it would turn and come back, back, back. Where would it stop? How high would it rise? Would it flood in in peaceful calm as it was then drawing away? Would it come crashing in heavy assault upon the sands as it generally did, beating out his life against the rock? He could not tell. He gazed at it intently so long as there was light, endeavoring to decide the momentous question. To watch it was something to do. It gave him mental occupation, and so he stared and stared at the slowly withdrawing water-line.

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Of the two he thought he should prefer a storm. He would be beaten to pieces, the life battered out of him horribly in that event; but that would be a battle, a struggle,—action. He could fight, if he could not wait and endure. It would be a terrible death, but it would be soon over and, therefore, he preferred it to the slow horror of watching the approach of the waters creeping in and up to drown him. The chief agony of his position, however, the most terrifying feature in this dreadful situation to which his years of crime had at last brought him, was that he was allowed no choice. He had always been a man of swift, prompt, bold action; self-reliant, fearless, resolute, a master not a server; accustomed to determine events in accordance with his own imperious will, and wont to bring them about as he planned. To be chained there, impotent, helpless, waiting, indeed, the judgment of God, was a thing which it seemed impossible for him to bear. The indecision of it, the uncertainty of it, added to his helplessness and made it the more appalling to him.

The judgment of God! He had never believed in a God since his boyhood days, and he strove to continue in his faithlessness now. He had been a brave man, dauntless and intrepid, but cold, paralyzing fear now gripped him by the heart. A few lingering sparks of the manhood and courage of the past that not even his crimes had deprived him of still remained in his being, however, and he strove as best he might to control the beating of his heart, to still the trembling of his arms and legs which shook the chains against the stone face of the rock making them ring out in a faint metallic clinking, which was the sweetest music that had ever pierced the eager

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hollow of the ear of the silent listener and watcher concealed in the thicket.

So long as it was light Morgan intently watched the sea. There was a sense of companionship in it which helped to alleviate his unutterable loneliness. And he was a man to whom loneliness in itself was a punishment. There were too many things in the past that had a habit of making their presence felt when he was alone, for him ever to desire to be solitary. Presently the sun disappeared with the startling suddenness of tropic latitudes, and without twilight darkness fell over the sea and over his haggard face like a veil. The moon had not yet risen and he could see nothing. There were a few faint clouds on the horizon, he had noticed, which might presage a storm. It was very dark and very still, as calm and peaceful a tropic night as ever shrouded the Caribbean. Farther and farther away from him he could hear the rustle of the receding waves as the tide went down. Over his head twinkled the stars out of the deep darkness.

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In that vast silence he seemed to hear a voice, still and small, talking to him in a faint whisper that yet pierced the very centre of his being. All that it said was one word repeated over and over again, "God—God—God!" The low whisper beat into his brain and began to grow there, rising louder and louder in its iteration until the whole vaulted heaven throbbed with the ringing sound of it. He listened—listened—it seemed for hours—until his heart burst within him. At last he screamed and screamed, again and again, "Yes—yes! Now I know—I know!" And still the sound beat on.

He saw strange shapes in the darkness. One that rose and rose, and grew and grew, embracing all the others until its head seemed to touch the stars, and ever it spoke that single word "God—God—God!" He could not close his eyes, but if he had been able to raise his hand he would have hid his face. The wind blew softly, it was warm and tender, yet the man shivered with cold, the sweat beaded his brow.

Then the moon sprang up as suddenly as the sun had fallen. Her silver radiance flooded the firmament. Light, heavenly light once more! He was alone. The voice was still; the shadow left him. Far away from him the white line of the water was breaking on the silver sand. His own cry came back to him and frightened him in the dead silence.

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Now the tide turned and came creeping in. It had gone out slowly; it had lingered as if reluctant to leave him; but to his distraught vision it returned with the swiftness of a thousand white horses tossing their wind-blown manes. The wind died down; the clouds were dissipated. The night was so very calm, it mocked the storm raging in his soul. And still the silvered water came flooding in; gently—tenderly—caressingly—the little waves lapped the sands. At last they lifted the ghastly head of young Teach—he'd be damnably mouldy a hundred years hence!—and laid it at his feet.

He cursed the rising water, and bade it stay—and heedlessly it came on. It was a tropic sea and the waters were as warm as those of any sun-kissed ocean, but they broke upon his knees with the coldness of eternal ice. They rolled the heavier body of his faithful slave against him—he strove to drive it away with his foot as he had striven to thrust aside the ghastly head, and without avail. The two friends receded as the waves rolled back but they came on again, and again, and again. They had been faithful to him in life, they remained with him in death.

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Now the water broke about his waist; now it rose to his breast. He was exhausted; worn out. He hung silent, staring. His mind was busy; his thought went back to that rugged Welsh land where he had been born. He saw himself a little boy playing in the fields that surrounded the farmhouse of his father and mother.

He took again that long trip across the ocean. He lived again in the hot hell of the Caribbean. Old forms of forgotten buccaneers clustered about him. Mansfelt, under whom he had first become prominent himself. There on the horizon rose the walls of a sleeping town. With his companions he slowly crept forward through the underbrush, slinking along like a tiger about to spring upon its prey. The doomed town flamed before his eyes. The shrieks of men, the prayers of women, the piteous cries of little children came into his ears across forty years.

Cannon roared in his ear—the crash of splintered wood, the despairing appeals for mercy, for help, from drowning mariners, as he stood upon a bloody deck watching the rolling of a shattered, sinking ship. Was that water, spray from some tossing wave, or blood, upon his hand?

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The water was higher now; it was at his neck. There were Porto Bello, Puerto Principe, and Maracaibo, and Chagres and Panama—ah, Panama! All the fiends of hell had been there, and he had been their chief! They came back now to mock him. They pointed at him, gibbered upon him, threatened him, and laughed—great God, how they laughed!

There was pale-faced, tender-eyed Maria Zerega who had died of the plague, and the baby, the boy. Jamaica, too, swept into his vision. There was his wife shrinking away from him in the very articles of death. There was young Ebenezer Hornigold, dancing right merrily upon the gallows together with others of the buccaneers he had hanged.

The grim figure of the one-eyed boatswain rose before him and leered upon him and swept the other apparitions away. This was La Guayra—yesterday. He had been betrayed. Whose men were those? The men hanging on the walls? And Hornigold had done it—old Ben Hornigold—that he thought so faithful.

He screamed aloud again with hate, he called down curses upon the head of the growing one-

eyed apparition. And the water broke into his mouth and stopped him. It called him to his senses for a moment. His present peril overcame the hideous recollection of the past. That water was rising still. Great God! At last he prayed. Lips that had only cursed shaped themselves into futile petitions. There was a God, after all.

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The end was upon him, yet with the old instinct of life he lifted himself upon his toes. He raised his arms as far as the chains gave him play and caught the chains themselves and strove to pull, to lift, at last only to hold himself up, a rigid, awful figure. He gained an inch or two, but his fetters held him down. As the water supported him he found little difficulty in maintaining the position for a space. But he could go no higher—if the water rose an inch more that would be the end. He could breathe only between the breaking waves now.

The body of the black was swung against him again and again; the head of young Teach kissed him upon the cheek; and still the water seemed to rise, and rise, and rise. He was a dead man like the other two, indeed he prayed to die, and yet in fear he clung to the chains and held on. Each moment he fancied would be his last. But he could not let go. Oh, God! how he prayed for a storm; that one fierce wave might batter him to pieces; but the waters were never more calm than on that long, still night, the sea never more peaceful than in those awful hours.

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By and by the waters fell. He could not believe it at first. He still hung suspended and waited with bated breath. Was he deceived? No, the waters were surely falling. The seconds seemed minutes to him, the minutes, hours. At last he gained assurance. There was no doubt but that the tide was going down. The waves had risen far, but he had been lifted above them; now they were falling, falling! Yes, and they were bearing away that accursed body and that ghastly head. He was alive still, saved for the time being. The highest waves only touched his breast now. Lower—lower—they moved away. Reluctantly they lingered; but they fell, they fell.

To drown? That was not the judgment of God for him then. What would it be? His head fell forward on his breast—he had fainted in the sudden relief of his undesired salvation.

Long time he hung there and still the tide ebbed away, carrying with it all that was left of the only two who had loved him. He was alone now, surely, save for that watcher in the bushes. After a while consciousness returned to him again, and after the first swift sense of relief there came to him a deeper terror, for he had gone through the horror and anguish of death and had not died. He was alive still, but as helpless as before.

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What had the Power he had mocked designed for his end? Was he to watch that ghastly tide come in again and rise, and rise, and rise until it caught him by the throat and threatened to choke him, only to release him as before? Was he to go through that daily torture until he starved or died of thirst? He had not had a bite to eat, a drop to drink, since the day before.

It was morning now. On his right hand the sun sprang from the ocean bed with the same swiftness with which it had departed the night before. Like the tide, it, too, rose, and rose. There was not a cloud to temper the fierceness with which it beat upon his head, not a breath of air to blow across his fevered brow. The blinding rays struck him like hammers of molten iron. He stared at it out of his frenzied, blood-shot eyes and writhed beneath its blazing heat. Before him the white sand burned like smelted silver, beyond him the tremulous ocean seemed to seethe and bubble under the furious fire of the glowing heaven above his head—a vault of flaming topaz over a sapphire sea.

He closed his eyes, but could not shut out the sight—and then the dreams of night came on him again. His terrors were more real, more apparent, more appalling, because he saw his dreaded visions in the full light of day. By and by these faded as the others had done. All his faculties were merged into one consuming desire for water—water. The thirst was intolerable. Unless he could get some his brain would give way. He was dying, dying, dying! Oh, God, he could not die, he was not ready to die! Oh, for one moment of time, for one drop of water—God—God—God!

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Suddenly before his eyes there arose a figure. At first he fancied it was another of the apparitions which had companied with him during the awful night and morning; but this was a human figure, an old man, bent, haggard like himself with watching, but with a fierce mad joy in his face. Where had he come from? Who was he? What did he want? The figure glared upon the unhappy man with one fiery eye, and then he lifted before the captive's distorted vision something—what was it—a cup of water? Water—God in heaven—water brimming over the cup! It was just out of reach of his lips—so cool, so sweet, so inviting! He strained at his chains, bent his head, thrust his lips out. He could almost touch it—not quite! He struggled and struggled and strove to break his fetters, but without avail. Those fetters could not be broken by the hand of man. He could not drink—ah, God!—then he lifted his blinded eyes and searched the face of the other.

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"Hornigold!" he whispered hoarsely with his parched and stiffened lips. "Is it thou?"

A deep voice beat into his consciousness.

"Ay. I wanted to let you know there was water here. You must be thirsty. You'd like a drink? So would I. There is not enough for both of us. Who will get it? I. Look!"

"Not all, not all!" screamed the old captain faintly, as the other drained the cup. "A little! A drop for me!"

"Not one drop," answered Hornigold, "not one drop! If you were in hell and I held a river in my hand, you would not get a drop! It's gone."

He threw the cup from him.

"I brought you to this—I! Do you recall it? You owe this to me. You had your revenge—this is mine. But it's not over yet. I'm watching you. I shall not come out here again, but I'm watching you, remember that! I can see you!"

"Hornigold, for God's sake, have pity!"

"You know no God; you have often boasted of it—neither do I. And you never knew pity—neither do I!"



**"I wanted to let you know there was water here ...
There is not enough for both of us. Who will get it?
I; look!"**

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"Take that knife you bear—kill me!"

I don't want you to die—not yet. I want you to live—live—a long time, and remember!"

"Hornigold, I'll make amends! I'll be your slave!"

"Ay, crawl and cringe now, you dog! I swore that you should do it! It's useless to beg me for mercy. I know not that word—neither did you. There is nothing left in me but hate—hate for you. I want to see you suffer——"

"The tide! It's coming back. I can't endure this heat and thirst! It won't drown me——"

"Live, then," said the boatswain. "Remember, I watch!"

He threw his glance upward, stopped suddenly, a fierce light in that old eye of his.

"Look up," he cried, "and you will see! Take heart, man. I guess you won't have to wait for the tide, and the sun won't bother you long. Remember, I am watching you!"

He turned and walked away, concealing himself in the copse once more where he could see and not be seen. The realization that he was watched by one whom he could not see, one who gloated over his miseries and sufferings and agonies, added the last touch to the torture of the buccaneer. He had no longer strength nor manhood, he no longer cried out after that one last appeal to the merciless sailor. He did not even look up in obedience to the old man's injunction. What was there above him, beneath him, around him, that could add to his fear? He prayed for death. They were the first and last prayers that had fallen from his lips for fifty years, those that day. Yet when death did come at last he shrank from it with an increasing terror and horror that made all that he had passed through seem like a trifle.

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When old Hornigold had looked up he had seen a speck in the vaulted heaven. It was slowly

soaring around and around in vast circles, and with each circle coming nearer and nearer to the ground. A pair of keen and powerful eyes were aloft there piercing the distance, looking, searching, in every direction, until at last their glance fell upon the figure upon the rock. The circling stopped. There was a swift rush through the air. A black feathered body passed between the buccaneer and the sun, and a mighty vulture, hideous bird of the tropics, alighted on the sands near by him.



Hell had no terror like to this, which he, living, suffered.

So this was the judgment of God upon this man! For a second his tortured heart stopped its beating. He stared at the unclean thing, and then he shrank back against the rock and screamed with frantic terror. The bird moved heavily back a little distance and stopped, peering at him. He could see it by turning his head. He could drive it no farther. In another moment there was another rush through the air, another, another! He screamed again. Still they came, until it seemed as if the earth and the heavens were black with the horrible birds. High in the air they had seen the first one swooping to the earth, and with unerring instinct, as was their habit, had turned and made for the point from which the first had dropped downward to the shore.

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They circled themselves about him. They sat upon the rock above him. They stared at him with their lustful, carrion, jeweled eyes out of their loathsome, featherless, naked heads, drawing nearer—nearer—nearer. He could do no more. His voice was gone. His strength was gone. He closed his eyes, but the sight was still before him. His bleeding, foamy lips mumbled one unavailing word:

"Hornigold!"

From the copse there came no sound, no answer. He sank forward in his chains, his head upon his breast, convulsive shudders alone proclaiming faltering life. Hell had no terror like to this which he, living, suffered.

There was a weight upon his shoulder now fierce talons sank deep into his quivering flesh. In front of his face, before a pair of lidless eyes that glowed like fire, a hellish, cruel beak struck at him. A faint, low, ghastly cry trembled through the still air.

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And the resistless tide came in. A man drove away the birds at last before they had quite taken all, for the torn arms still hung in the iron fetters; an old man, blind of one eye, the black patch torn off the hideous hole that had replaced the socket. He capered with the nimbleness of youth before the ghastly remains of humanity still fastened to that rock. He shouted and screamed, and laughed and sang. The sight had been too horrible even for him. He was mad, crazy; his mind was gone. He had his revenge, and it had eaten him up.

The waters dashed, about his feet and seemed to awaken some new idea in his disordered brain.

"What!" he cried, "the tide is in. Up anchor, lads! We must beat out to sea. Captain, I'll follow you. Harry Morgan's way to lead—old Ben Hornigold's to follow—ha, ha! ho, ho!"

He waded out into the water, slowly going deeper and deeper. A wave swept him off his feet. A hideous laugh came floating back over the sea, and then he struck out, and out, and out—

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And so the judgment of God was visited upon Sir Henry Morgan and his men at last, and as it was writ of old:

With what measure they had meted out, it had been measured back to them again!



*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIR HENRY MORGAN, BUCCANEER: A ROMANCE OF THE SPANISH MAIN ***

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