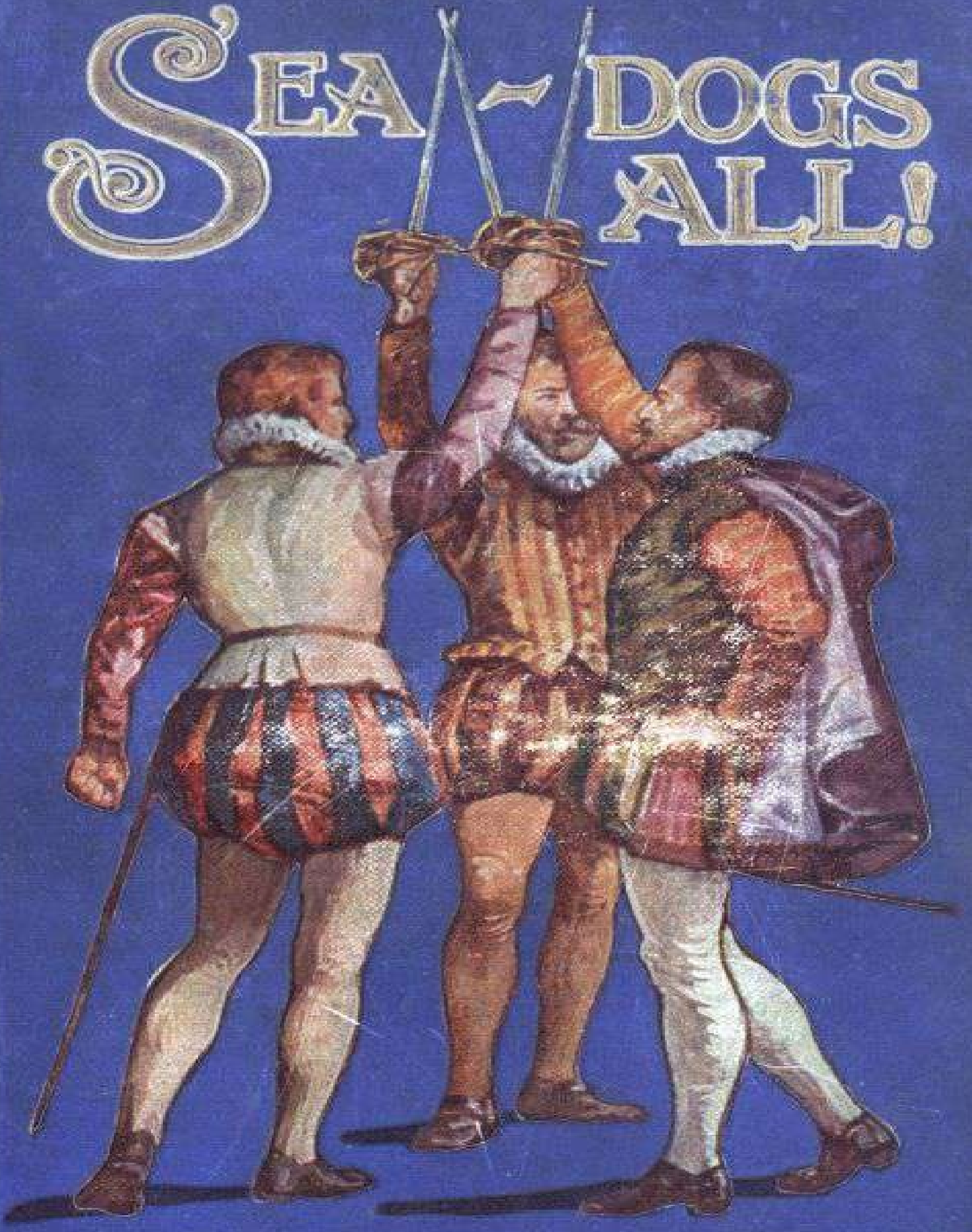
SEA-DOGS ALL!



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Cover art

Dolly stood near the fire, her face rosy with the heat

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Sea-Dogs All!

A Tale of Forest and Sea

BY

TOM BEVAN

Author of
"Red Dickon the Outlaw,"
"The Fen Robbers,"
etc., etc.

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS
London, Edinburgh, Dublin, and New York
1911

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Dolly stood near the fire, her face rosy with the heat . . *Frontispiece*

The odds were hopelessly against him.

SEA-DOGS ALL!

Chapter I.

THE MAN IN BLACK.

The river-path along the Severn shore at Gatcombe was almost knee-deep with turbid water, and only a post here and there showed where river ordinarily ended and firm land began. Fishers and foresters stood in the pelting rain and buffeting wind anxiously calculating what havoc the sudden summer storm might work, helpless themselves to put forth a hand to save anything from its fury. Stout doors and firm casements (both were needed in the river-side hamlet) bent with the fury of the sou'-wester that beat upon them. The tide roared up the narrowing estuary like a mill-race, and the gale tore off the tops of the waves, raised them with the lashing raindrops, and hurled both furiously against everything that fringed the shore. Gatcombe Pill leapt and plunged muddily between its high, red banks, and the yellow tide surged up the opening and held back the seething waters like a dam. There was black sky above, and many-coloured earth and water below.

The lading jetty against the village only appeared at odd moments above the tumult of waters, and a couple of timber ships that lay on the north side, partially loaded, were plunging and leaping at their anchor cables like two dogs at the end of their chains. Great oaken logs bobbed up and down like corks, or raced with the current upstream; the product of many weeks' timber-cutting in the forest would be scattered as driftwood from Gloucester to the shores of Devon and Wales.

On the high bank above Gatcombe, one other man, half hidden by the thick trees, braved the fury of the storm. There was nothing of the fisher or forester about him; the pale, worn face and the tall, lean figure soberly clad in black betokened the monk or the scholar, but claimed no kinship with them that toiled in the woodlands or won a living from the dangerous sea. Leaning against a giant beech that rocked in wild rhythm with the storm, he watched the wind and

tide at their work of devastation, an odd smile of satisfaction playing about the corners of his thin lips.

"A hundred candles to St. James for this tempest!" he murmured. "If the ships do but break loose and get aground, I will tramp Christendom for the money to build him a church." But though the man in black watched the river for the space of two hours longer, his hopes of utter destruction were unrealized; the cables held, the rain ceased, the wind abated, and the tide began to run seawards once more. Bit by bit the jetty rose above the swirling waters. Inshore the sands of the river-bed were uncovered, and the fishers and wharfmen swarmed along them and on the pier, saving from the sea the logs of oak that were within reach. For a while the man on the cliff watched them; then he turned aside into the dripping recesses of the forest. "Comfort thyself," he said, tapping his bosom as he walked; "the omens are good. What water hath commenced, the fire shall finish!"

Almost upon the instant a sturdy figure broke from the bushes above Gatcombe Pill and hurried along the cliff towards the harbour. Deep-chested, full-throated, weather-stained, compacted of brawn and sinew, he looked the ruddy-faced, daring sailor-man, every inch of him. From crown to toe he was clad in homely gray; but if, on the one hand, the ass peeps out from the borrowed lion's skin, so will royalty shine through fustian; and the newcomer had the air of a king among men. He hallooed to the ships, and then hastily scrambled down the cliff.

Only the groaning of the trees and rustling of the undergrowth hid the footfalls of the man in black from the ears of the man in gray. He was looking for him, but the time when they should meet was not yet come.

Chapter II.

THE PLOTTERS.

The morrow after the storm was windless and genial; the morning stepped out from the east bearing the promise of a fine day; the tide was running strongly

to the sea. At Newnham the ferryman stood knee-deep in the water washing his boat and hoping for a fare. The man in black came down and was carried across to Arlingham. He asked many questions concerning the tides and the sands. The water ran like a mill-race round the Nab, and the stranger crossed himself when he entered the boat, and again when the ferryman took him on his back to carry him through the shallow water and the mud. He paid the penny for the passage, and then vanished quickly into the trees that shut in the village of Arlingham from the river. The boatman watched him curiously and fearfully; and when he was no longer visible he shivered, for a cold chill was running down his spine. "Seems as though I'd carried the Evil One," he muttered; "he may halloo till he's as hoarse as his black children the crows ere I trust myself on the waters with him again." He waded to his boat and rowed rapidly across stream once more.

The man in black gave neither thought nor look to the ferryman, but strode along the woodland paths like one who had not a moment to spare. The broad Roman way stretched in a bee-line from the eastern shore to the village, but the wayfarer never once set foot upon it. Swiftness and secrecy marked every movement. The sun had been above the horizon scarce an hour when the mysterious stranger knocked at the door of a farmhouse that lay about a mile from the village and northwards towards the river. It was opened on the instant by the farmer himself, and barred and chained again.

In the kitchen were four men, two of whom wore black doublet and hosen, black caps with a black feather, and were sallow-looking counterparts of the last arrival. They stood up, bowed gravely, and sat down again without speaking.

"You have kept good tryst, my sons; did any man see you?"

"Not even the eye of the sun lighted upon us; we walked by the stars," was the reply.

"Good! Now, your tidings.—Thine first, Basil."

The younger of the two men clad in black looked up. Hitherto he had maintained a strict silence, his eyes fixed on the floor. The face that was lifted to the morning light was not a pleasant one. It was pasty, colourless, and shrunken as though from long fasting, but the eyes glittered in their dull sockets like a pair of black diamonds. "Fanatic" was written large all over him. He was a monk released from his vows for the performance of special duties. His tidings were

given slowly in short, terse sentences.

"Admiral Drake is at Gatcombe."

The leader nodded. "I know it; I saw him yesterday," he said.

"He hath wind of our plot and a description of your person. Sir Walter Raleigh comes up from Bristol on this morning's tide. 'Tis given out that he is visiting the Throckmortons, from which family he took his wife. The truth is, that he comes to assist the admiral against us."

"Doth he bring troops?"

"No, but the admiral hath a royal warrant empowering him to call the free foresters and miners to arms if need should arise."

"That is nothing."

"I have a list of those families that still profess the true faith. Almost to a man they place their country before their Church, and prefer to fight for their heretic Queen rather than the Holy Mother of Heaven."

"The fiery pit yawns for them, my son!"

"But there are true sheep amongst these herds of goats. Two have I brought with me. Their eyes are opened. Wisdom and far-seeing dwells with them. They value not the things of this world and the comforts of the body. They are sworn to serve the Holy Church to the death." The speaker turned to two rather hang-dog fellows who were squatted beside the hearth. "Kneel, my brothers," he cried, "and receive a blessing from Father Jerome, a saint amongst men!"

"Tush! my son," said Father Jerome; "thou dost rate my poor worth a thousand times too highly. The blessing I bestow is greater far than he is who bestows it; the gift is greater than the giver."

The whole company fell upon their knees, and Father Jerome towered above them. There was cunning in his sallow face, cruelty in the corners of his mouth. He held his hands aloft and spoke low and mysteriously.

"When the Holy Father called me and entrusted me with my present mission

he gave me his blessing thrice repeated, and bestowed upon me the power of passing on that blessing to others. The blessing then that ye receive at my hands is the blessing of the Head of the Church. Kings have begged for it and have not obtained it; but ye are greater than kings." The disguised priest—for such was Father Jerome—placed his hands on them one by one and murmured a long Latin invocation. At the end of this he addressed the farmer and the two foresters, who had been beguiled into the plot, speaking in plain, forcible English.

"Your country," he exclaimed, "wallows in heresy and other deadly sins. For years hath it openly flouted and resisted the Church. The hour of retribution is near. By sword and by fire must her sins be purged. The instruments of vengeance and punishment are appointed, and the least of these am I. Before the sun hath run another yearly circle through the heavens a faithful prince shall hold power in this land. Many who are now in high estate shall be flung down, and there are some humble ones that shall be mightily exalted. Think of that, my sons, and be true to the trust reposed in you!"

Father Jerome raised up his kneeling audience with a well-chosen word of praise, promise, or encouragement for each one. Then he bade the farmer set meat and ale before the two foresters, and took his two clerical spies to the window-seat, where he conversed with them in low tones.

"Thy two recruits, son Basil, are not overburdened with brains."

"The better shall they serve our purpose, my father. We want blind tools rather than thinking men. I have them in the hollow of my hand. Thews and sinews are theirs, and an intimate knowledge of the woods. If they will but carry out my bidding without question, I shall be well content."

"Thou art right.—And now, son John, how hast thou sped upon thine errands?"

"Well, father, the bracken will be fit to cut in a month. I have ordered loads to be prepared for me in all parts of the forest. The soil of the woodlands is everywhere green with the curling fronds; and where I do not cut, the foresters and miners will be preparing heaps to carry away for litter and bedding. By the end of July the forest beneath the oaks will be covered with a carpet of stuff as combustible as tinder. Let us but fire it at Newnham, Littledean, Blakeney,

Coleford, and at Speech by the courthouse, and we shall lay tens of thousands of oaks in blackened ruin. Philip of Spain has but to scatter the present small navy of England, for no more ships can be built, and there will be nothing to oppose his landing."

"Thou hast done well. Our plans are fully ripe, but apparently the time is not quite come. We will separate for a month and remain in strict hiding. The admiral's suspicions are aroused. If we suddenly disappear at the moment when he becomes active in searching for us, his fears will be allayed. But at the appointed moment we must come forth without a sign of warning, do our work, and begone again. Our tools must be frightened into secrecy. I will do that. Let us now join them at breakfast."

It was not the fault of Father Jerome that the breakfast party was not a happy affair. Perfectly at ease himself, and satisfied with his morning's work, he was in the mood for decorous jollity; but although his two immediate satellites responded to his lead, and indulged in a few feeble jests, the farmer and foresters hardly vouchsafed a word or a smile. In part, maybe, this was due to the poverty of the wit of their sable companions, but the three were obviously ill at ease. Greed and a sort of religious fanaticism had brought them into the ranks of the conspirators, but their national instincts were rebuking them each moment. They felt traitors, and not all the sophistries of the priests—which put the Church first, and country a long way after—could ease their minds of a burden of shame. The chief conspirator watched them narrowly, and some dark thoughts concerning them ran through his mind.

The morning was advancing, and it behoved the plotters to separate. The leader gave them a few words of caution and command, and then bade the farmer go to his work as though nothing unusual was afoot; the rest would vanish one by one into the surrounding woods or across the river. One of the foresters betook himself off immediately, journeying on to Frampton, where he had some relatives, his visit to them being an ostensible reason for his presence on the wrong side of the Severn. He was a hard-faced fellow, with a pair of small, greedy-looking blue eyes. Father Jerome pressed his hand very affectionately at parting, and the man found three silver shillings sticking to his palm when his hand was free again. He strode away with a buoyant step, his misgivings gone for the while.

The other woodlander arose the moment the door was closed behind his

companion.

"Wait a while, my son," said Jerome.

"I have something to say before I go."

"Ah! say on." The priest's face set somewhat sternly, for he did not like the forester's manner.

The fellow began without hesitation, and spoke as a man whose mind was full of the matter whereon he talked. The three in black listened.

"Good father, I have sworn an oath to be thy servant in a certain business."

"And thou canst not break that oath without hurling thy soul to eternal damnation," was the stern rejoinder.

"It is not in my mind to break my oath."

"What then?"

"If thou wilt listen, I will show thee that perhaps it would be better to release me from my vow."

"Impossible!"

"Listen. I am pledged to do a deed that the law will hold to be treason. I place myself in secret enmity to nearly every one of my countrymen. Did they but suspect me, they would hang me without mercy. A dog in their eyes, I should meet a dog's death."

"Tut!" broke in the priest sharply, "thy reasoning is all wrong. Thou, for the sake of truth and right, art placing thyself like a second David against a host of evil men. Dost hope for their good opinion?"

"But, good father," pleaded the fellow, "it doth not appear to me that I am doing right. Queen Bess—God bless her!—lives in the hearts of us all. Why should I work her a mischief in order to advance the King of Spain, whom we cannot but hate? Now, I bethink me, I have sworn to serve my Queen, but I have given no oath of fealty to the Pope. And as for your religion, well, I am in most

ways of one mind with you, and I think these Protestants to be no better than heretics. Master Basil, whose learning is wonderful, did persuade me for the nonce that my duty lay along the path you are treading; but my mind misgives me woefully, and I cannot see that it is an honest thing to work in secret against the whole body of my fellow-countrymen."

Jerome's face had darkened, and Basil's lips were working evilly.

"But the whole body of thy fellow-countrymen are wrong!" he hissed. "God hath delivered them and their country into the hands of his faithful servant Philip."

"Then why doth Admiral Drake thrash the sailors of Philip whenever he meets them? God surely only fights for the right!" replied the forester.

This was a facer for the ex-priest, and ere he could frame a retort Jerome took up the matter again. "Thou hast said that thou art willing to keep thine oath."

"Not *willing*, but I will not willingly break it. My heart is no longer in the enterprise. I shall be ashamed to look my neighbours in the face. I shall fear their glances and despise myself. When the pinch comes, I may turn coward and do nothing. The whisper of conscience is more terrible than the roar of a lion. What will it avail you to look for help to such a one as I?"

"If I release thee—?"

"My lips are sealed. I have learned your plans, but I am honest with you. Be honest with me, and men shall tear out my tongue before I will speak a word of you or your plot."

Jerome sat silent for a few moments. Suddenly he started up.

"Thou art an honest fellow," he exclaimed, "and I believe thee. Half-hearted men are useless to me. Thou art released from thine oath. Go!"

Basil started to protest, but his leader placed his hand on his lips. The forester went out, feeling as though a mountain had been lifted from his shoulders. He disappeared at a turn in the lane. Then Jerome spoke. "Thou art our lay-brother, Basil. That man must not cross the river."

Basil nodded and went out. Whilst Jerome yet watched him, slipping from cover to cover, the farmer re-entered, a look of mingled fear and hesitation on his face. The priest turned instantly and noticed it. He laid his hand on his shoulder. "I am not yet gone, as thou seest. There is something I would show thee before I go."

For the space of about ten minutes the two stood in silence. Then the priest said "Come," and led the farmer from the house. He followed in Basil's footsteps, and came at length to the foot of a dwarf oak. A man lay there, his eyes glazing in death. Basil was wiping a dagger in the bracken.

Jerome pointed to the dying woodsman. "That man doubted and hesitated," he said.

The farmer shuddered, and went white-faced homewards.

Chapter III.

TWO FRIENDS.

Admiral Drake sat amidst his roses, watching the tide as it raced up the river. Every day he sat thus, unless some pressing duty forbade, for the sea held first place in his heart. When the tide was out, the river was dull and dreary enough to the heart of the bold sailor. To gaze on a stretch of a mile or more of sand and mud, with a shallow, yellow stream dividing it into two unequal portions, is not exhilarating; but when the sea makes its wild rush up the estuary, quickly filling the wide river-bed from bank to bank, then the Severn is noble enough, and one looks upon it with pride. The swirl and roar of the waters was music to Sir Francis, and the tide was an old and well-beloved friend that came up daily to embrace him. The happiest of the knight's waking hours were those he spent by the side of the flowing salt stream.

There was a click at the latch of the garden gate, and a most elegant gentleman sauntered gracefully in. His doublet was of blue, slashed silk, his feathered cap was of a colour to match, and there were golden buckles to his

shoes and golden hilts to sword and dagger. His beard was trimmed to a dainty point, and curling locks slightly flecked with white hung down to his broad shoulders. The admiral, in his gray homespun, his short, frizzled hair bared to the breeze, turned at the sound of approaching footsteps, caught sight of the gentleman in blue, and sprang up to greet him.

"Now the winds of heaven be thanked for wafting thee hither, dear Wat," he cried. "Thou art more welcome than a fine day."

And the bluff sailor took the dainty visitor in his arms and kissed him lovingly on both cheeks. Embrace and kiss were heartily returned, and, arm in arm, the two sought the garden seat, and sat down to gaze on the sunlit waters and exchange tidings. Raleigh—for the visitor was none other than the famous knight of Devon—placed his sword across his knee and began the conversation; the rough and ready admiral was a better listener than talker.

"The Queen hath sent thee some coils of stout rope by my hand."

"Oh!"

"She saith that she hath had no news of Spanish acorns dangling from the Dean oaks. Her words to me were: 'Tell my knight of the seas not to spare the hemp where traitors are concerned. To hang none is to let all escape, whereas to hang on reasonable suspicion is a sure way to rid his plantations of many knaves. If he should make a mistake, through excess of zeal, tell him that our pardon is assured beforehand.'"

Drake smiled. "'Tis a good thing there is but one woman in the government, and that men are entrusted with the carrying out of her orders. Beshrew me, Wat, let but a scare be started and she would hang every ill-favoured fellow she clapped eyes on."

Raleigh laughed. "Thou hast no faculty for comprehending the whimsies and oddities of womankind, especially royal womankind."

"That is but sober truth. I can see in a bee-line as well as most men, but I cannot follow all the twists and turns of our royal lady's pathway. Bethink thee how she treated me when I came home from my voyage round the world, my vessel crammed to the hatchway with Spanish treasure. Before the court she frowned on me, called me no better than a sea-thief, and threatened me with a

hanging. Aboard my vessel, when none were there but Cecil, Leicester, and thyself, she praised me without stint, flattered me, well-nigh took me in her arms and kissed me, offered me knighthood, and then seized upon the best part of my hard-won spoils! Her mind doubles like a hare; there is no catching it and holding it and seeing of what colour it is. I have navigated unknown seas enough, but I should be shipwrecked in one month of court life. A palace is as full of guile as an egg is full of meat!"

The admiral was waxing warm, and his companion was laughingly enjoying his tirade.

"Every man to his trade, Frank," he said. "Thou art a striker of straight blows, and hast no cunning save when the foe is in gunshot. The sea breeze is life to thee, but some of us would choke with too much of it. We must breathe ever and anon of the scented atmosphere of courts. The turns and twists of intrigue attract us; we love to ruffle it in silk as well as in mail or in homespun. The voices and faces of fair women make music and beauty for our ears and our eyes; we love the harp and the lute as well as the mavis and throstle in the hedgerow, and we pore as diligently over a sonnet as thou dost over a sea chart."

"And that to me is a strange thing," replied Drake musingly. "Sometimes thou and I are so close in touch as to be almost one; yet, again, we find ourselves a world's space asunder: our thoughts oft run in couples like hounds, and 'tis because of such times that I love thee as a very dear brother."

Raleigh laid his hand affectionately on the admiral's shoulder. "Thou, Frank, art a man of action ever and always. When the battle is in my blood I can fight on land and sea as whole-heartedly as thou, and cry out that only such days are worth the living. Yet I am by nature a dreamer of dreams and a weaver of fancies. The soft, the still, the beautiful in the world and humankind, attract me. I would have seclusion rather than bustle and turmoil, the pen rather than the sword, the sweet whispers from a woman's lips and not the shouts of warriors. Thou dost not understand me, but I understand thee, and love thee for thy simplicity and directness. Thou art a better man than I, Frank, and the world will honour thee more than me. But let us quit this self-analysis. How art thou faring in thy mission to prevent the destruction of the forest?"

"Slowly. The forest is one vast hiding-place, and I have to deal with men who are very serpents for cunning. The leader is a Spanish priest masquerading as a

gentleman, and he hath with him some of a like sort. They are for ever popping up in fresh places, but it is not easy to tell them one from another. There may be a dozen of them, or only two."

"The lesser number is the more likely. The more in a plot, the greater the danger of failure."

"So I have thought, and I put down their many appearances to the expedition with which they move. At present they can only plan mischief. There is little woody undergrowth, and the bracken is at its greenest. Ere long, however, the foresters and miners will begin the yearly cutting and drying of the bracken, which they take away and stack for the winter as bedding for themselves and their cattle. Then the danger is great indeed, and the firing of the forest an easy matter to a number of determined men skilfully posted."

"Have the conspirators many adherents?"

"I think not. The woodland folk are loyal, and have a right and proper hatred of the King of Spain. Let me but lay hands on one man and we may sleep in our beds without fear."

"And that man?"

"Is the priest, Father Jerome."

Raleigh sat up. "Canst describe him?"

"Ay. He is tall, lean, and yellow, looks a Spaniard, but speaks English as no foreigner could speak it. He hath money in plenty, and poor folk and greedy folk often fall a prey to Mammon."

"I have met this Father Jerome, unless I mistake him greatly. He is a Spaniard without doubt, and came hither first in the train of the Spanish ambassador in King Harry's reign. He came again with Philip when he took Queen Mary to wife, and stayed here the whole of that reign and much of the present. He knows our land and our language as well as thou or I, and Philip has chosen the fittest leader for his bold enterprise. Thou hast gotten a dangerous adversary; do not hold him cheaply, for he obtains a strange power over some men. 'Tis against his nature to strike openly. He works like a mole, and thou must find his place of burrowing and trap him. Meantime I commend the advice of the Queen to thee:

lay all suspicious characters by the heels at once; put rogues to catch rogues, and have a care how thou walkest in the woods."

Sir Walter arose, but the admiral pressed him to stay and drink a cup of wine. So the two friends sat on a while longer, talking of old times in far-away Devon.

Hidden in the bushes on the top of the sandstone cliff that backed Drake's house was the dark figure of Basil. He wriggled thither at the moment when Raleigh lifted the garden latch.

Chapter IV.

JOHNNIE MORGAN TAKES A WALK.

At the foot of the hill leading out of Blakeney northwards towards Newnham stood a many-gabled, substantial farmhouse. A plantation of oaks backed it, and eastwards the meadows stretched away to the Severn. The house was in the possession of John Morgan, a verderer[1] of the forest, and the good folk of the forest and river were proud to point to him as a "proper figure of a man." "Johnnie," as he was familiarly styled by his associates, stood a good two inches over six feet, was straight as a fir and tough as a young oak. He had just turned his twentieth year, and was as fleet of foot as the stags that he guarded. Dark-eyed and handsome, light-hearted and jovial, a good singer of a good song, he was as jolly a companion as one might meet on a long summer's day.

The morning was hot, and the June sun almost at its zenith. The gale that had rocked the tall trees in fury but a few days before was almost forgotten in the windless weather that had succeeded it. Master Morgan had sauntered along one of the broad woodland paths, and was now lying on his back in a sweet-smelling bed of bracken, gazing up through the trees to the blue sky beyond. Johnnie was dreaming the happy dreams of youth and the summer's noontide. The blue of the heavens haloed his thoughts, and a pair of sweet blue eyes looked out from the midst of them. A sigh escaped him. "Plague on 't!" he cried petulantly, "I cannot get verses or rhymes into marching order. My head aches with a tumble of conceits and dainty fancies. I could whisper a thousand pretty things to yonder

perky robin; I cannot give tongue to one of them when Mistress Dorothy turns her eyes upon me; and now that my heart yearns to set them in verse for her reading, I cannot frame a line that doth not limp and stumble. What a thing it is that I can sing the tears into mine eyes with another fellow's verses and cannot build a couplet of mine own." Johnnie closed his eyes, puckered his brow, and thought hard.

For the better part of an hour Morgan had the cool nook in the woodland all to himself, and he dreamt of a pair of blue eyes, rhymed them with "skies," joined "love" with "dove," "sweet" with "fleet," "rosy" with "posy," and "heart" with "part," and cudgelled his brains for images and conceits that would express in some scant measure the charms of pretty Mistress Dorothy Dawe. But his lines would not prance and curvet as he wished them to do; they laboured along in a heavy, cart-horse fashion, so that Johnnie at length reluctantly recalled his wandering wits to the consideration of the practical things of life. And, immediately upon doing so, he became conscious of the presence of an intruder upon his privacy. Some one was moving very stealthily through the bracken; the young forester detected the quick breathing of a man and he held his own breath in an instant, whilst his body remained as rigid as though it had been a fallen log of oak. He cast his eye down the line of buttons on the front of his doublet and carefully scanned his belt. It held no weapon save a hunting-knife. His hearing became doubly acute at a sign of danger, and he fixed the spot from which each faint rustle proceeded. Meanwhile his brain was busy. Who should be stealing along within a few yards of the pathway? No game was afoot in the immediate neighbourhood, and no forester would be worming himself along in such a fashion. An honest man would walk upright. "This fellow is a rogue," commented Morgan. The bracken fronds curled high above him, and he knew that he was securely hidden. The rustling sounds circled round rather than approached him, and they finally ceased at a spot on the edge of the pathway about twenty yards below where Morgan lay listening.

The forester remained very still; the other made no sign. Morgan came to the conclusion that his presence was unsuspected, so he lay in wait to see what was afoot. Time flew on; to one, at least, the silence became irksome.

Sounds at last! Some one was coming down the pathway humming a song. The spy—for such he was—stirred. Morgan noiselessly raised himself on his elbow. The singer came on; his voice was rich and musical, and the young fellow's ears tingled with pleasure. He ventured to peep above the bracken. A

dark form was half visible in front of him, and the face was turned towards the direction whence the song was coming. The head disappeared; Morgan ducked also. He could give no guess as to the identity of the man who lay before him. But his mind was made up as to the spy's intentions. Villainy was plainly foreshadowed. He drew his knife from his belt. The footfalls of the traveller were now audible. He came abreast of the lurking foe; he passed him. There was a sudden leap; then another. A steel blade flashed in the sunlight. The song ceased and the singer turned. Another second and the dagger would have been in his breast. But at the fateful moment of time the stroke was arrested by Morgan's hand. The would-be assassin turned with the hiss and wriggle of a viper; his strength was astonishing, and, ere Morgan was aware, the sharp stab entered his own arm. He loosened his grip with an exclamation of pain. The spy darted like a black shadow into the trees—and was gone.

After an instant of hesitation Morgan and the stranger dashed after him. They ran hither and thither, but found nothing. On the pathway they met again, and, for the first time, spoke. He whose life had been attempted took Morgan's wounded arm in his hands. "I owe thee, if not a life, at least a whole skin," he said. "I am deeply thy debtor."

"Sir Walter Raleigh can owe nothing to a forest man," exclaimed Morgan.

"Ah! thou knowest me. What is thy name?"

"John Morgan, heart and soul at your service!"

"I have heard of thee from my kinsman, and the reports were of an excellent quality. Come, let me see to thy hurt. We can gossip afterwards."

Soldiers and huntsmen are usually adepts at rough and ready surgery; the flow of blood from Morgan's wound was stanched and the injured limb bound up. Sir Walter inquired how he had so providentially got upon the track of the spy, and Johnnie poured out the story of his poetic difficulties. The knight laughed heartily, and offered his help.

"I am a bit of a rhymster, as thou knowest," he said. "What is the name of the bonny maiden whose eyes have driven thee to verse-making?"

"Mistress Dorothy Dawe," replied the forester a little sheepishly—"a sweet wench, Sir Walter, as e'er the sun shone upon. And I thought her name as pretty

as her face, but, plague on't, I cannot fix a rhyme to 't."

"And there I sympathize with thee most heartily, Master Morgan. When I was of thine age and went a-sweethearting, my own fancy lighted upon a dainty damosel yclept Dorothy, and, like thee, I found the name most unreasonable in the matter of rhyme and rhythm. Cut it down to 'Dolly,' and that most unkind rhyme 'folly' straightway dings in one's ears."

"How didst thou surmount the difficulty?"

"How? By keeping the name well in the middle of my line. But there are a hundred pretty appellations that befit a maiden. Thou canst call her thy 'sun,' thy 'moon,' thy 'star,' thy 'light, 'life,' 'goddess,' and so on through a very bookful of terms. Shall I make thee a verse as we jog along?"

"A thousand thanks! but no. I will stand on mine own footing, or stand not at all. I will win the wench by mine own parts or merits, or else wish her joy with a better man. She shall love me decked in mine own plain russet, not in velvet and laces borrowed from another's wardrobe."

"Valiantly spoken, Master Morgan. I like thy spirit, and, beshrew me, 'twill serve thee better with a sensible maiden than any amount of pretty speeches and cooing verses. 'Tis a poor man that hath not faith in himself. In wooing, as in fighting, 'tis the brave heart and the honest soul that gain the clay; and the quick, strong arm serves the world better than the glib tongue. But let us get to this business that brought us together this morning. Thou dost not know my assailant?"

"Not from Adam. Hath your worship no knowledge of him?"

"No certain knowledge, Master Morgan; but I can give a shrewd guess or two concerning him. Thou hast heard of the plot of King Philip to destroy the forest?"

"Ay, the rumour was abroad strong enough in the springtime, but since Admiral Drake came down I have heard nothing. I thought the rascal plotters had fled, for 'tis well known the health of a Spaniard suffers grievously if he do but breathe the same air as our gallant sailor."

"That is so; but some are of tougher constitutions than others, and they do not

sicken in a day. The fellow who hath left his mark upon thee is an emissary of Spain. I did not know my life was threatened, but the admiral may find a foe in any thicket. I am heartily sorry the villain escaped us."

"I am downright ashamed on 't!" cried Johnnie. He drew himself up to his full height and stretched out a brawny arm. "I ought to have crushed him 'twixt finger and thumb as I would a wasp. A lean, shrivelled, hole-and-corner coward!"

"But as strong and supple as a wild cat," commented Raleigh.

"Ay, and he left the mark of his claws behind him," added Morgan. "He was no weakling."

"And he is not the only one lying in wait; nor is he the master hand in this business. You verderers must bestir yourselves, or that which is entrusted to you will go up to the heavens in smoke. I will wend with thee to Newnham. The admiral goes thither on the tide this afternoon on the Queen's business, and 'twill be as well that he, and those that come to meet him, should see evidence of the activity of our secret foes."

So the knight and Master Morgan mended their pace along the woodland way.

[1] A warden of the forest and an administrator of "forest law."

Chapter V.

MASTER WINDYBANK.

"Then thou dost refuse to listen to my suit, Mistress Dorothy?"

"Refuse! Alack, good Master Windybank, what a word to utter. Look at yonder sundial and thou wilt see that I have hearkened most patiently for more than an hour." Mistress Dorothy opened her blue eyes very widely, and her tone

was a trifle indignant.

"Ay, but there is listening and listening, mistress," was the testy response.

"And surely my listening deserves commendation, seeing that I made no interruption, scarcely speaking a word."

"But I wanted thee to speak, to interrupt, to contradict, to argue. Thy silence betokened indifference. I had rather that thou hadst flown into a temper and bidden me begone than sat mum all the while." Windybank jumped up from the garden seat and began to pace to and fro, to the peril of Dorothy's flower-beds.

"But why should I argue or contradict or fly into a passion if thou dost tell me my eyes are blue? 'Tis the truth." Dorothy opened them wider, and made them look more innocent and beautiful than ever.

"Was that all I said for the space of an hour?" was the sullen rejoinder.

"No," said the cool little maiden, "'twas not; but thou didst offer no ground for argument. I heard a catalogue of virtues recited, and was bidden to believe that mine own small person gave lodging and nourishment to them all. Well, in good faith, sir, 'tis my earnest hope that some are guests in my heart, and I would fain believe that I give harbourage to all the noble train. Thou didst speak at some length of thyself, thy hopes and aspirations, they were such as would become thy youth and station: why should I quarrel with thee concerning them? Again, I had a list of thy possessions, the tale of gold in thy coffers. Should I give thee the lie over thy arithmetic? Thy uncle is rich, and thou art his heir. Shall I lose my temper because of John Windybank's money?"

The youth turned fiercely upon the maiden and gripped her by the shoulders so that she winced with the pain. "I—told—thee—that—I—loved—thee!" he said with deliberate emphasis. "What hast thou to say to that?"

"That a maid is honoured by the affection of any good man."

"Dost thou love me?"

"No," said Dorothy, rising also and removing his hands.

Windybank's eyes were blue like those he confronted, but they were as shifty

as the maiden's were steady, and whilst the blue of hers deepened with anger, his assumed a greenish tint that was both uncomely and cruel. For a moment he stared into the azure deeps before him, trying to fathom them. He failed.

"Would 'No' have been Jack Morgan's answer?" he asked.

Dorothy's eyes flashed, but her lips remained closed. She showed no signs of anything save anger. The baffled lover lost his head, and with it went his common sense and veneer of gentlemanly breeding.

"Silence is answer enough," he snarled. "Morgan's black eyes and swarthy face have bewitched thee as thou hast bewitched me. Well, take thy choice between us. He hath the start of me in inches, but a moon-calf would hardly benefit by bargaining wits with him—a grinning, guzzling giant whose chief delight is singing songs in a tavern or wrestling with brawny clowns as empty-headed as himself!"

Windybank paused for breath, and Dorothy faced him as unflinchingly as before, her lips curling in contempt.

"Hast nothing to say now?" he went on. "Have I not given thee matter for contradiction, fuel to feed the fires of thine anger?"

"John Morgan needs no woman's help," she said quietly.

"Neither help of man nor woman shall avail him ere long. Hark'ee, mistress" (he lowered his voice): "there is power awaiting the man bold enough to make a venture to obtain it. Look for the day when I am thy master. And tell some others to look to their heads. I'll break thy spirit yet, and see fear in thy blue eyes instead of scorn. I am no braggart!"

"But thou art a coward!" said Dorothy, whose face had grown very white. "Think not that I shall feel anything save scorn for the man who threatens a girl and slanders the absent. Thou art our neighbour, else I would call a servant to put thee forth on to the highway. Begone!"

Master Windybank turned to go. It was time, for Johnnie Morgan and Sir Walter could be seen making their way towards the house door. "Tell thy long-legged swashbuckler of our meeting," he sneered.

"I do not fear thee enough to call in a champion," cried Dorothy calmly. "Yonder is the gate."

The rejected suitor strode off. The maiden ran into a little arbour and had a good cry. "Sweet seventeen" does not like to be bullied and threatened by a man in whom her quick eyes have discerned the possibilities of a thorough villain.

The little shower of anger and wounded pride lasted about three minutes. Then sunny thoughts broke through the clouds, and presently the sky was clear again. "Johnnie is come!" said Dorothy's heart. "Sir Walter and Master Morgan are in the house," murmured Dorothy's lips. "I must see to my duties as hostess, and I do not want to be quizzed about tear-stains. Plague take that little Windybank!" A dainty foot was stamped quite viciously. "I hope Johnnie will cudgel him. A whipping would do him good!" Dorothy sat with folded hands and pleasantly contemplated the corrective operation. Then a voice was heard in the garden calling her name. She listened. "Only nurse!" she murmured in a disappointed tone.

An old crone with a wrinkled but good-natured face came along to the arbour. "Dolly, sweetheart," she cried, "dost thou not know who is within?"

"I saw Sir Walter turn in at the gate to speak to father."

"Hoighty-toity!" exclaimed the old dame. "Saw Sir Walter, did we! And what of the head and pair of shoulders that stood above those of the knight? We did not see them!"

"Was it Master Morgan with him, Peggy?" asked Dorothy unconcernedly.

"Ask him who ran away just now," snapped Peggy. "I saw the toady little villain sneak off. I'd ha' given my Sunday kirtle to my worst enemy if Johnnie had espied him and known that he and thee had been sitting cheek by jowl for an hour."

"Master Windybank is our neighbour," said Dorothy haughtily, "and he comes hither with my father's consent."

"Ay, men are as blind as owls to each other's failings," was the tart response. "But I can see through a quick-set hedge as far as most folks, and know when a rascal lies in hiding behind one. Get thee indoors and talk to Master Morgan, an

honest fellow whom thy mother—God rest her soul!—loved before death took her from us."

But Dorothy refused to be hurried. Peggy had loved her and mothered her since she was a tiny prattler of three, and she often found her, as she declared to her gossips, "a handful." Peggy, angry with her nursling, turned to go, but she discharged a telling shot at parting. "Very well!" she cried, "I'll go and bind up Master Morgan's wounds myself. One of the bravest knights in England is attacked by a Spanish giant in the forest. A brave lad jumps in to save him, and receives the dagger in his own body. He comes to those who should love him, to have the flow of his precious blood stanched; but no, good lack; we love not brave lads—we dally away God's good time with cowards and rascals!"

"Peggy! Peggy!" cried Dorothy, and the blue eyes were running over again, and the cheeks were pale as a ghost's, "is Master Morgan wounded?"

"He may be dying; the dagger perhaps was poisoned," said Peggy. "I'll go and kiss the brave lad whilst he has wit enough left to know me. Stay thou here, mistress; only loving hands must tend the brave!"

But Dorothy flew after her and clutched her arm. "Kiss me, Peggy!" she wailed, "kiss me!" But Peggy refused.

"You shall not touch him, Peggy; you are my nurse, but I am his. Do you hear?"

But the old woman was deaf, and she stalked on with her thin nose in the air. Dorothy clung to her, and they reached the house together. It so happened that the story of the attack had been told to Dorothy's father, and Sir Walter was getting a little fun at the expense of Johnnie and his wrestlings with the muse of poetry. A lively, good-humoured sally, at the moment when Dorothy's trembling limbs carried her over the threshold, evoked a peal of stentorian laughter from Master Morgan's capacious lungs. The tearful maid stood bewildered for an instant, then a roar from all three men brought the colour back swiftly to her cheeks. Johnnie Morgan dying? The wicked rascal was convulsed with merriment, and his friends, who should be sorrowing for his untimely fate, were as merry as he! With an indignant look at the chuckling Peggy, the maiden turned and fled into the garden again. But Master Morgan, who had been anxiously listening for her amidst all the chatter and uproar, heard the light patter

of her footsteps upon the flagged courtyard. He sprang to the window, caught sight of the flying figure, felt his heart beating like a great drum, murmured an apology to his companions, and darted out of the room, almost laying Peggy full length on the threshold as he ran off.

Chapter VI.

A SINISTER MEETING.

When Master Windybank left the quaint, riverside garden of Captain Dawe, he was feeling about as amiable as a wolf might feel who has just been scared from the side of a lamb by the timely arrival of a huge sheep-dog. He growled with anger, showed his teeth for an instant, then slunk away with his tail between his legs. He was a spiteful, malevolent creature, cunning, unprincipled, and tainted with cowardice. He had pluck of the wolfish sort, and could fight desperately if cornered; but he shunned the open unless hard pressed, and preferred snapping at an opponent's heels to flying in his face. He was a dangerous foe, and pretty Dorothy had gone far towards making one of him.

In no pleasant frame of mind, Andrew Windybank strode up the high street of the town. Few of the townsfolk gave him a good-day; he was not a popular personage. For one thing, he was a Littledean man and not of the river-side; his family was purse-proud and tyrannical; worst of all in the eyes of a Pope-hating people, the Windybank family still clung to the old faith. Young Master Andrew was quite accustomed to cold looks, and, as a rule, they troubled him not at all. He was by nature reserved and uncommunicative, and he was sufficiently well satisfied with himself to care but little for the opinion of other people. He turned aside from the town and breasted the steep hill that led to Littledean.

Windybank had not walked through the town with his ears shut, although he had studiously kept his eyes lowered. More than once he had heard the name of his rival mentioned, and each time the speaker's tones had expressed admiration and affection. The angry young gentleman knew nothing of Morgan's exploit, but the local gossips had seen the forester pass through, and one had succeeded in getting an account of the morning's affray. Johnnie was more than ever a

popular hero. It was unfortunate, perhaps, for Dorothy and her rival suitors that Morgan's arm and Windybank's pride had both been wounded on the same morning. The rejected lover had always envied and hated Morgan because of his popularity; the events of the morning were rapidly turning that hatred into a sort of malevolent frenzy. His heart burned with rage and jealousy as he went rapidly homewards.

Now, a man's heart will sometimes be attuned to goodness, and his whole nature, being aglow with conscious virtue, will yearn for some outlet for the kindliness that wells up within him. None is offered, and the virtuous fountain trickles itself dry, and no one is a whit the wiser or better. Anon, the same heart breeds envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, and straightway comes the chance of working evil. The temptation is great, the opportunity is eagerly seized, and wickedness is done; it is so easy to step into the "broad way," so difficult to find footing in the "strait and narrow path."

Andrew Windybank was not a good man, but apt opportunity led him farther astray than, in the depths of his heart, he ever intended to go. His feet were treading the paths of his own domains. His ancestral home, Dean Tower, raised its dark red walls before him. Some of the bitterness was gone from his thoughts. Visions of the wealth, wherein he was superior to his rival and the maiden who had flouted his advances, were easing the wounds in his pride.

A spare figure, garbed in black, stepped from behind a clump of bushes, and stood bareheaded in the pathway.

"God be with thee, Master Windybank, and St. James be thine aid!" exclaimed a harsh voice. Basil confronted him.

Windybank's first feeling was one of annoyance. Basil and his master, Father Jerome, had visited Dean Tower before, and although they had come and gone in secret and by night, yet some suspicion of these Spanish visits had got abroad. The Dean men were proud of their magnificent sweep of forest-clad hills and dales, and prouder still of the oaks that gave their beloved England her impregnable "wooden walls." They were wild with anger and indignation when the first rumours of King Philip's plot came to their ears. Now they were inclined to treat the daring project with quiet contempt, but Windybank knew that scant mercy would be shown a forest man who should be so unspeakably treacherous as to favour the scheme, even by so little as holding converse with one of the

hated plotters.

These thoughts running through his mind, Master Andrew did not return the Spaniard's salutation, but waved him aside and endeavoured to continue his way. Basil barred the path, his black plumed hat still in his hand, and his face wearing a caricature of a smile.

"One faithful son of the Church should not refuse greeting to a brother," he said.

"What dost thou want?" was the curt response.

"I am come upon business that hath the blessing of the Holy Father."

"I'll not listen!"

Windybank thrust out his arm to push his unwelcome companion aside. Basil took him by the shoulders and stared into his face with an intentness that made the young fellow fancy that the fierce, black orbs confronting him were burning holes in his brain. For two minutes, that seemed two full hours, the gaze was concentrated upon him. Windybank felt his body shrinking into a smaller compass under the fascination. His breath came thickly, his knees trembled, and his heart laboured in its beating.

"The Holy Father hath sent a message to thee."

"I have heard it," was slowly gasped out.

"He hath sent another. Thou darest not refuse to listen." The ex-monk's hand was uplifted in warning. "Shall I be forced to curse thee as thou standest?" he whispered. '"Tis obey, and be blessed above measure; or refuse, and—thou knowest the penalty; I will not speak it here. Listen! Father Jerome and I will come to thee at midnight. Thou wilt meet us at thy gate and show us to a chamber where we may confer in secret. Remember!"

Windybank felt the iron hand lifted from his shoulder. Basil was gone. For a minute he stared blankly at the bush behind which he had disappeared. A warning signal, "At midnight, remember!" came to his ears, and awoke him from his half-stupor. He shook himself, tried to answer, uttered no word, then passed on. He entered his house with a face that matched his ruff in its sickly yellow

colouring.

Chapter VII.

IN THE TOILS.

That afternoon the house of Captain Dawe was filled with visitors more or less illustrious. The dignitaries of the forest and the river were assembled in solemn conclave. The scare caused by the first rumours of the Spanish plot was revived in tenfold magnitude. Morgan's wounded arm was a mute witness to the daring and activity of the foe. The knight and the forester could describe every lineament of the would-be assassin. The yellow, parchment face, the spare, sinewy body clad in black doublet and hosen, had been seen for a moment by many a forester. And the woodland men, brimful of superstition, had already invested him with supernatural powers.

A belated swineherd had gone in terror to his master with a story that he had come upon the "men in black" dancing beneath an oak, enveloped in blue flames, and that the smell of the "brimstone" had laid him on the ground in a stupor from sunset to moonrise, more than an hour after! The following day, in the early forenoon, he had led a trembling party to the spot, and, sure enough, there was a blackened circle in the bracken and the charred bark and singed leaves of the tree to testify to the truth of his tale. Neither swineherd nor shepherd nor forester had dared to pass the tree from that hour. The woodsman's story was not all exaggeration. He had actually stumbled upon the two villains, Basil and John, trying the kindling properties of the bracken, and he had promptly fallen in a swoon from sheer terror. By the common folk his account was believed *ad literam*, and not all the better sort saw the true inwardness of the occurrence. So the assembly had serious matter for thought and discussion.

The leaders saw the gravity of the situation, and their apprehensions grew when they found that those who best knew the forest were becoming rapidly infected with superstitious fears. As a race the Dean men were brave and tenacious—centuries of border warfare had made them so—but their very life amidst the gloom of the trees and the roaring of the streams, their brains teeming

with mythic tales of the dark, deep pools and echoing caves, made them ready believers in the "uncanny." The forest could only be guarded by those who knew its devious ways; the number of such warders was limited. Now it would be impossible to get any man to keep a lonely watch; sentinels must be posted in groups for mutual comfort and assistance, seeing that the tangible danger of Basil's dagger was to be feared as much as the intangible perils that sprang from the imagination. To group the watchers was to narrow the guarded area, and it was plain to the council that, at night especially, little of the rolling tract of hill and valley could be patrolled; the foe would have fairly free range.

One precaution could be taken, and that was promptly done. Orders were issued that no bracken was to be cut except with the direct sanction of the admiral. When cut it was to be carried green, and dried away from the trees. Large rewards were also offered to any man who could bring any "man in black," alive or dead, to the admiral. Visions of high preferment were opened out to those of gentle blood. Suspected persons in the forest area were to be closely watched, and most houses professing the Romish faith were under suspicion.

Johnnie Morgan spent but little time in the society of the volatile Dorothy. His heart was full of love, but his head was overloaded with affairs of state, and the pain in his arm filled the air with "phantoms" in black that blotted out the sweeter picture of a teasing "fairy" in white. The admiral, never so happy as when on the water, went back to Gatcombe on the tide. Sir Walter tramped through the woods with Morgan, and, now that the council was over, he came back to the lighter topics of poetry and love-making.

"Well, Master Morgan," he cried merrily, "and how didst thou fare in the pretty arbour in the garden?"

Johnnie's face dropped to a gloomy length. "But indifferently, sir knight. The maid will not be wooed. She is as fickle as April."

"Then catch her just when she melts into tears; 'tis the more propitious time. Surely there was one little shower over thy wounded arm. What advantage didst thou reap from it?"

"Why, none," mourned Johnnie. "'Twas like this. I had wit enough to see that my unfortunate condition gave me a chance, and, I give thee my word, I manoeuvred to make the best on't. The wench seemed melting with pity, and her

eyes were moist with kindness, so I made the plunge. But, gramercy! I found myself in a very thorn bush, and hardly escaped without a scratching. She'll ha' none of me!"

Johnnie's brown face was a study. Raleigh glanced at it, and laughed heartily.

"Keep heart, friend," he said. "Thou wilt find that 'tis as hard a matter to embrace a wayward fairy as to lay a sooty goblin by the heels. But thou'lt do both; a knowing imp hath just whispered the news in mine ears."

The forester's face beamed. "Now Heaven bless thee for a cheerful companion!" he cried. "By St. George! I'll *do* both."

And so the twain wandered on.

At Dean Tower, Andrew Windybank passed an uncomfortable afternoon. His meeting with the dangerous Basil had affected him more than his rejection by Dorothy. As the day advanced his agitation increased. He knew of the meeting at Captain Dawe's. No invitation had been extended to him, and he was aware from this that his loyalty was suspected. Tidings of the attack upon Raleigh went the round of the household. Later, towards evening, a fisherman came up from Newnham with salmon, and he was full of gossip concerning the deliberations of the admiral's council. The fellow dropped some broad hints that stung the ears of the Windybank domestics. At supper Master Andrew felt that his attendants were uneasy and suspicious, and this increased his agitation. Night and its solitude brought him no relief. The household betook itself to rest. The master alone remained up and awake.

The night was gloriously clear, and the moonlit forest was like fairyland. The windows of the chamber in which Windybank awaited the stroke of midnight faced towards the river, and the sheen of its broad waters was plainly visible. He sat without a light, and the silvery beams from without cast fantastic shadows on the oaken floor and the dark panelling of the low walls. The carved furniture stood distorted and grotesque. The woodwork creaked as it cooled from the heat of the day, and a mouse that scuttled sharply across the floor brought the watcher to his feet with an exclamation of alarm. His nerves were strung to respond to every sight and sound. Again and again he resolved that he would not sit up or have further dealings with the plotters. Loyalty and manliness and the fear of evil report pulled him one way; greed, ambition, desire for revenge, terror of Father Jerome and the thunders of the Church pulled him another. His mind was so torn with dissension and struggle that at last he gave up all endeavour to fix a path for himself. He sat blank and apathetic, conscious only that he was carrying out the order so menacingly given to him by Basil.

Midnight came, and he roused himself and stood up. He listened for signs of wakefulness in his household, but, within and without, the hour was soundless. He stole across the room to the window, then hesitated. Pressing his burning temples with his hands, he tried to come to some decision as to his conduct. Should he quietly summon a few of his men, bring in the plotters and arrest them? If he did this, surely it would atone for the dealings he had had with them? Honour whispered, "Get thee to thy slumbers, and go to-morrow to the admiral and make thy confession." He turned away from the lattice. A slight rattle attracted his attention. The blood rushed from his face, leaving him as cold as death. The dark form of Basil, silhouetted by the moonlight, was confronting him. One glare of angry reproach from the sinister eyes was enough. He opened the casement; Basil stepped in, and Father Jerome followed.

The two stood and eyed him severely. The priest laid his hand on his shoulder, and the ghost of a smile flickered across his pale countenance. Many a poor wretch had found that smile a herald of tragedy. Such it now appeared to the hapless owner of Dean Tower.

"'Tis past midnight, my son," said Jerome.

Windybank made no reply. The grip on his shoulder tightened with a startling suddenness. "'Tis past midnight, my son."

"Yes?—is it? I was coming, good father," faltered the victim.

"When thou art doing the work of a king—of the Holy Father—of God," whispered the priest, "thou shouldst put wings upon thy feet. Take heed, my son! We love thee" (the smile deepened); "we look to thee to do great things and earn great rewards. Let not our dearest hopes be disappointed."

Windybank glanced at Basil. There was death in the fanatic's eyes. "Forgive me," he murmured, and sank upon his knees.

Jerome raised him, and imprinted a cold kiss upon his forehead. "Sit," he said.

"The admiral hath held a council at Newnham to-day, and thou hast lost heart because a few dull wits have been pondering together," pursued the priest. "Dost thou know their plans?"

"Partly, father."

"A child might laugh at them! Our brave Basil here will reduce their watchmen to a jelly of terror before this moon wanes. When flies catch spiders, then these fools will catch us. Now hearken. If thou dost show the white feather again, thou diest; Basil hath sworn it. That is all that I have to say to thee by way of threat or reproof. Now this, by way of encouragement. We *cannot* fail. 'Tis the Church against heretics, the Holy Father against apostates, the mightiest king in Christendom against a vain and foolish woman. My plans are perfected. A vessel manned by stout hearts will be here, in the river, a month from to-day. Men who laugh at danger and have never known defeat will be aboard of her. They will land at my signal, and must find all things ready for the last blow. These miles of woodland will be ablaze; no guard, such as the admiral can set, will prevent us. I want thine aid. 'Tis an honour for thee to be linked with our holy cause; beware how thou dost carry the dignity. This house of thine must be hiding-place and headquarters for me. I shall come and go when I please, and, be assured, I shall time my movements so that none shall know of them. A safe asylum in the forest is necessary. I have chosen this. I command; thou dost obey. Have I made it plain to thee?"

Windybank's dry lips murmured "Yes."

"Thou hast an enemy?"

"I have."

"Basil hath set his mark upon him."

"I know it."

"If thou art faithful, thy rival dies. Now lead us to the chamber of which thou hast told us. Basil and I are weary, and would sleep. Come, thou shall wait upon us and make us secure."

The men in black slept at the Tower that night.

Chapter VIII.

MASTER WINDYBANK WALKS ABROAD.

A month came and went, and during that time the stir of apprehension died down in the forest. Men pursued their wonted occupations, by the river, in the greenwood and the mines, without let or hindrance. Night was as untroubled as the day; the dreaded men in black appeared no more. Wayfarer and forester forgot to scan bush and bracken for the deadly and cadaverous form of Basil. Simple, honest souls believed that the admiral's council at Newnham, and the measures of defence adopted thereat, had shown the emissaries of King Philip how impossible was their wild enterprise.

"Verily," said they, "the villains have gotten a fright, and are gone back to their rascally master."

Which opinion did credit to the clean-souled fellows who uttered it, and a glaring injustice to the cunning knaves who had caused such a fearful commotion amongst them. And all the while the plotters had secret harbourage at Dean Tower, coming and going by stealth and in the darkness, avoiding all men, playing no bogy tricks, but maturing their plans.

Andrew Windybank had lived the wretchedest month of his life. A mountain

of care bowed him down, and fear, rage, jealousy, and wounded pride gnawed unceasingly at his heart. He knew that he was a suspected person: his neighbours shunned him; many of his servants and dependants, by sidelong looks and spying ways, showed that they mistrusted him. Within a week of the time when Father Jerome and his two lieutenants quartered themselves upon him, the young master of Dean Tower went about with pale face and bowed head, ashamed to meet the eyes of a passer-by; and all the time wild anger surged up in his heart, equally against those whose tool he was and against those who stepped aside with a shrug to let him pass. He suffered all the agonies that come upon weak natures that fall into temptation or succumb to evil influences. He dreaded the power of the Church of Rome; he shivered as he thought of the terrors of England's laws against traitors. He loved his country in a way, and he was proud of her; yet, having done nothing to merit the applause of his fellow-countrymen, he was maliciously envious of those who had risen to emergencies, or deliberately planned great deeds, and thus won themselves fame. He loved Mistress Dorothy, and he felt that, if she would only love him, he could be brave and noble; yet he hated the easy-going, simple-hearted Johnnie Morgan, who had made himself a popular idol, and was marked out by the gossips as the fittest and properest husband for pretty Mistress Dawe. Master Windybank could not help but admire the valiant admiral, and he remembered how he had flushed with pleasure when Drake had taken him by the hand on the occasion of their introduction. He hated and feared Father Jerome: but he was aiding his schemes, and endeavouring to frustrate those of the gallant sailor whom he honoured.

As the days wore on, unceasing fears began to torture him. Did any one know of his treason? One aged servitor only had been admitted into the secret of the unwelcome guests in the Tower, and the honest veteran had gone straightway upon his knees and besought his young master to cast them out. Of the Romish faith himself, he would have no hand in plots against his lawful Queen, and no truckling to the cruel bigot who sat upon the throne of Spain. But love of his master brought him into the snare, and made him an unwilling tool of the conspirators. Both fear and affection lead men to belie their better selves.

After a month of what was almost seclusion, Andrew Windybank determined to spend a morning by the river. He walked into Newnham, and made his way to the ferry to watch the tide race up the river. Men, horses, and dogs were coming across from Arlingham, as the verderers of the forest had a great hunt fixed for that very day. Windybank, as a verderer, should have remembered this, but weightier matters had driven it from his mind.

There was plenty of bustle at the ferry; men were shouting, horses were neighing, and hounds were baying. The townsfolk had come down to welcome their friends from the other side, but no Newnham man approached the master of Dean Tower. There was some whispering, some furtive glancing in his direction, and the Arlingham folk cut him as completely as did those of Newnham.

With his heart full of rage and malice, the young gentleman turned on his heel and strode off up the street. He held his head defiantly erect, and he gave scorn for scorn and shrug for shrug. From the open window of "Ye Whyte Beare" a jolly, rolling peal of laughter told him that young Morgan was within, and two boar-hounds tethered to the doorpost proclaimed that the Blakeney yeoman purposed hunting other game than the timid deer that day.

Higher up the street the angry man encountered a group of dark-haired, sallow-faced miners who were taking a holiday, and a hiss of "Papist! papist!" greeted him as he passed. His hand went to the hilt of his dagger, but the fellows flourished their oaken cudgels within an inch of his nose; so he contented himself with a counter hiss of "Insolent dogs!" and went on.

Resolved to face his foes, Master Andrew walked the whole length of the high street, although the road to Littledean branched off about halfway up. This meant that he must pass Captain Dawe's cottage, which dainty habitation he had not looked upon since the morning when his wooing had been interrupted by the coming of his wounded rival. The angry colour fled from his face, and his head sank lower and lower as he neared the place. The sound of Dorothy's voice in the garden unnerved him completely; shame swept over him like the swift river-tide that still roared in his ears, his chin fell on his breast, and a ghastly pallor whitened his cheeks. A sob broke from him as he bent low and hurried by. He did not dare to snatch even a glimpse of the scene beyond the hedge.

But he heard his name called in quick but quiet tones, "Master Windybank! Master Windybank!" His heart almost ceased beating. The shock of detection made him pause for an instant, and that brief space of time brought Dorothy into view. He would not run, but turned towards her, throbbing with the panting fears of a creature brought to bay. The wild light in his eyes was quenched when he saw the kindly glow in the blue orbs of the maiden. She put out her hand.

"Thou art almost a stranger," she said.

The youth's dry lips could frame no answer, nor did he take the proffered hand. Kindly concern, where he had expected contempt and reproach, completely unnerved him. Dorothy's hand was still held out, and her eyes grew kinder as he looked into them. He took the dainty fingers in his trembling hand and pressed them to his hot, dry lips. Dorothy had almost the sensation of a burn, and she winced. Windybank took the movement as a repulse, and threw the hand from him.

"Art thou going to torture me too?" he cried harshly. "Why do you all hate me so?"

"Hate!" echoed Dorothy. "La! Master Windybank."

"I am shunned like a leper," he went on. "Shall I get me into a sheet, carry a bell, and cry 'Unclean! unclean!' as I walk the roads?"

"But I do neither hate thee nor shun thee, else I had not called to thee. 'Tis thou dost make a hermit of thyself. And thou art ill and fevered," she added compassionately; "thou art wasted well-nigh to a shadow."

"I have no rest, no peace," he groaned. "I am scorned of my neighbours, spied upon, suspected, insulted. Do ye all think I have no heart to feel these things, no spirit to resent them? But I can return hate for hate, injury for injury. Let some men look to themselves!"

His tones were so fierce that Dorothy quailed. She recovered herself quickly.

"Come into the garden," she said.

"I cannot come where I am not welcome."

"I am asking thee."

"I shall not come."

"Then must I come to thee."

Suiting action to the words, the maiden hurried through the gate, and in a minute more Windybank was sitting beside her in the arbour.

Now Mistress Dorothy was a maiden very prone to act upon impulse. She would do a thing, and then, after accomplishment, consider the action, and ofttimes repent. She had never entertained any very great liking for Master Andrew, although her father had at one time made much of him and favoured him as an acceptable suitor for his daughter's hand. But the fact that the young gentleman was in serious disgrace, and spoken ill of by those who smoked their pipes and sipped their ale around the captain's table, softened her heart towards him. Ugly clouds of suspicion hung over him, and men said bitter things concerning him; but to Dorothy's mind the alleged treason seemed impossible. The accused man, she would argue, was a gentleman and a forester; he had sat at her father's board, he had spoken of love to her: such a one could not be a traitor; she would not condemn him unheard. But she had resolved to put him upon trial if opportunity offered. The opportunity had come, and, believing in his innocence, she seized upon it.

Dorothy went straight to her task without bush-beating. She told Master Andrew very plainly what men were saying about him, and then she asked him some blunt and awkward questions. Windybank was cunning; he saw that in Dorothy he had a friend and a ready champion. To answer her questions truthfully was to forfeit her good opinion and turn her liking into loathing. He determined to fence.

The maiden would have none of it. "I must have plain answer to plain question!" she cried.

So Master Windybank gave answers that appeared stamped with the mark of truth. He assumed the indignation of a wronged innocent, and spouted with some heat a torrent of lies and cunning half-truths.

It was all very cleverly done, especially the contrite confessions concerning interviews with Father Jerome and his brother-conspirators. He acknowledged that men had had some cause to suspect him. "But," exclaimed he, "a man should not be written down a criminal because some one asks him to commit a villainy. All of us are liable to temptation!"

"Truly spoken!" said Dorothy. "However, we must not parley with the tempter, but flee from him."

"That is not easy," answered Andrew, "for these men steal about like very

wolves. They spring into one's path when least expected. It is impossible to avoid them."

Dorothy tapped her companion's sword. "Thou art armed," she said, "and so are they. What shouldst thou do when an avowed enemy of the Queen crosses thy path actually engaged in evil-doing?"

Windybank gulped. "Cut him down," he replied.

"Exactly!" Dorothy arose and held out her hand.

"I expect to hear that a gentleman and a forester has done his duty to his Queen, himself, and his friends."

The master of Dean Tower bowed, murmured some words of loyalty and devotion, and then took his leave. He went the longest way home, avoiding all frequented ways near which Basil might be lurking. Loyalty and treason, lodged in his heart, fought a dire fight, and, thanks to the vision of a pretty face, treason was rather badly wounded.

Chapter IX.

THE HUNT.

By the time he had reached home, Windybank was persuaded that treason would bring no grist to his mill. Weak-kneed and inclined to evil, he was yet an Englishman, and in his heart he felt that all the kings that ever ruled in Spain were too feeble a power to hold valiant little England in a conqueror's grip. The Jesuit's plot was feasible, and, as expounded by Father Jerome, promised a measure of success. The master of Dean Tower was prepared to acknowledge that the forest might be fired. What then? Would Philip beat England on the sea? The balance of numbers would be on his side; but what of the deeds of Drake and his brother-captains? They were men who laughed when the odds were against them. "No," said Andrew decisively, "the Spaniard is not yet born who can trounce that bullet-headed man of Devon. Philip's men can hardly land in

England. If they do—!" The young man shrugged his shoulders expressively; there were bonny fighters for the shore as well as for the sea!

Such was the power of a pair of blue eyes, when the black ones were not at hand to counteract their witchery, that Windybank determined straightway to play the honest man that he had determined to become. He whistled for his dogs, called to his groom, got him upon a sturdy pony, and hurried away to the hunt. He was late, but he knew that the quarry was to be roused in the Abbot's Wood, a close belt of forest lying betwixt Littledean and Blakeney, so he made for the old, grass-grown Roman road that ran straight through the heart of the woodland, and, ere he had ridden two miles, he could discern horn and "halloo!" away to the right towards the Speech.[1] His hounds heard the welcome sounds, gave mouth in answer, and dashed off through the green, waving sea of bracken. And master and groom, their forester blood running like a stimulating wine through them, put spurs to their steeds and raced off on the heels of the dogs.

After very little riding, the rapidly swelling volume of sound told the two hunters that the chase was coming straight in their own direction, and hardly had they come to this conclusion when a fresh and fiercer baying from their dogs and a ripping and crashing in the undergrowth brought them face to face with the quarry—a magnificent ten-point stag. Confronted unexpectedly by these fresh foes, the noble creature came to a terrified halt, and, flanks heaving, nostrils quivering, stared at them with wide-open eyes. But a yelp from the nearest hound and a view "halloo!" from Windybank sent it off again like a bolt from a crossbow.

"Head him back to the main chase!" yelled Master Andrew, and he rode off at a dangerous pace through the trees to carry out his own instructions. Dogs and man obeyed his voice with a will, and the unfortunate stag went bounding from one danger into the jaws of a greater. Terrified by the shouts and bayings behind him, and sorely hampered by the trees and undergrowth, he burst wildly into a glade, hoping to make a quicker dash for safety, but found himself, instead, confronted by a crowd of hunters on horse and afoot. Effectually cornered, he turned to bay, and the first hound that approached was tossed a good dozen yards, landing with a thud and a howl right under the heels of Dorothy's pony. Snapping viciously out at the nearest obstacle, the brute bit the pony just above the fetlock, causing it to rear, spring forward, and throw its rider into the midst of the dogs and within reach of the stag's horns. A cry of alarm went up, and Windybank, who was easily the nearest man, had the opportunity of his life. He

hesitated, and his rival, who had quitted the boar hunt when he found Dorothy riding after other game, sprang to the rescue in an instant. With his bare hands he threw the dogs aside and snatched up the unconscious girl just as the stag's antlers made the first savage rip at her riding-dress. The whole deed was done in the twinkling of an eye, and done single-handed. Morgan's quickness and cool daring had proved easily equal to the crisis, and loud cries of "Well done, Johnnie!" greeted the popular hero. For the nonce the quarry was left to the dogs, and Windybank, glancing round, saw that he was the only man still in the saddle; instinctively every other rider had sprung to the ground. No one appeared to notice him; so, conscious that his chance of regaining any share of popular esteem was gone, he swung his horse round and disappeared amidst the trees. His dogs were yelping with the rest of the pack, and not even his groom followed him. A feeling of hopeless loneliness crept over the young man's heart, and his head hung down, weighted with the bitterest thoughts of his life. His conscience was busy with accusing whispers—"Traitor! Coward! Fool!" The unspoken words burnt into his brain, and fired his dark face with the hues of a lurid sunset. He halted; no man could see him, and he listened to the clamour in the glade. He heard an exultant bay from one of his own hounds. The brute dared more than his master, and was taking a bold share in the events of the moment; and the vindictive master vowed to have the brave dog's life for outdoing him.

The spirit of mad hate was driving out the feeling of shame. He vowed with an awful oath that Morgan should share the hound's fate. All men were his enemies; why, then, should he spare them?

A hand of ice was laid on his hand, and he almost screamed with the sudden shock and surprise; he had heard no footstep. He raised his head, to find the stern, set face of Basil confronting him.

"What art thou doing here?" he cried hoarsely.

"Looking after thee."

"Begone, then; I'll not be dogged," exclaimed Windybank wildly. "If these men see us, our dooms are sealed."

"Thine was almost sealed," said Basil curtly. "'Twas in thine heart to play us false. Hadst thou held out the hand of friendship to yonder herd of heretics, thou wouldst have found me to-night both thy judge and executioner. Come, the time

is ripe for action. I spare thee because I need thee; but beware!"

Basil took the pony by the bridle and turned its head towards Dean Tower. "Father Jerome awaits thee," he said, "and thy life hangs in the balance. Go!"

And Windybank went.

[1] The ancient courthouse of the foresters; it still exists.

Chapter X.

MASTER WINDYBANK REBELS.

Andrew Windybank slunk away through the forest homewards. He had set out to play the man; he sidled in through his own gateway like a whipped puppy. Not once during his ride did he look back, and he neither hurried nor loitered; the former he would not, and the latter he dared not do, for he felt that Basil was watching him. Never for an instant did he lose the consciousness that the beady, black eyes were upon him. He felt them like two hot points in the middle of his back; they burned and bored, and the flesh seemed to shrink away from them beneath the taut skin.

For some time the sounds of the hunt came to his ears, but he heeded them not. "I am out of the hunt in all ways," he said bitterly. "Bugle-calls are not for me."

There is no more pitiable object than a man suffering under mental and moral defeat. He has lost faith in himself. He has tried, he has failed; and he usually throws his defeat in the face of Providence, accusing the Almighty of desertion. Windybank did so. Desperate with anger and humiliation, he went to his own private sanctum. Father Jerome and Basil were already there, awaiting him. Windybank could not repress a start of surprise when he found that the ex-monk had outstripped him. He had hoped for a few minutes of quiet thought before facing Jerome. A quick wave of anger swept over him when he realized how closely he was "shadowed." His footsteps dogged if he went abroad; his privacy

was broken, without so much as a "by your leave," if he stayed at home; he was treated as a puppet, a cat's-paw, a thing that must move only according to the will of another. A flash of light showed him the utter depth of his degradation; and the two basilisks that sat staring and motionless before him were the instruments that had accomplished his undoing. A wild yearning for freedom and vengeance arose in his heart.

"We have been waiting for thee since early morn, my son," said Jerome, breaking the silence. The tone of the speaker's voice was cold, hard, and threatening. The menace in it stung Windybank into rebellion.

"And why should ye not wait?" he cried. "Who, in God's name, are ye to establish yourselves unbidden in my house, dog my steps, threaten me, ruin me with my friends and neighbours, and treat me as though I were a child without will, aims, or desires of mine own? Ye have tarried for me; tarry on until doomsday. Henceforth I'll be master of myself!" Furious with passion, Master Andrew turned to the door.

The effect of this outburst was electric. Jerome sat as one stupefied, and for a bare instant Basil gazed as stonily as he; but he recovered in time to prevent the young man's departure. The yellow-faced fanatic was as quick-handed as he was quick-witted. Windybank had lifted the latch, and his fingers were on the door pulling it open. Basil drew his dagger, held it, poised, by the blade for a moment, then cast it with great force and precision. Master Andrew felt a hot pain in his hand, tried to pluck it back to his body, and failed; it was pinned fast to the door. Basil came forward, drew out the dagger, and led his host to the feet of Father Jerome.

"Thou art drunk," he said meaningly—"drunk with the poison of a wench's flattery. Down on thy knees and crave forgiveness!"

But the master of Dean Tower was thoroughly aroused, and was not to be cowed by a word. He threw Basil from him, and, wounded and bleeding though his hand was, he contrived to draw his sword.

"I'll kneel for forgiveness to no man living!" he cried. "Get ye from my house, or I will drive ye forth!"

Jerome had recovered from his astonishment; he rose up and laid his hand gently on the young man's shoulder. "Thou art beside thyself for the nonce, my

son. Let us talk calmly. A host does not draw sword on his guests."

The words were uttered in a smooth, purring tone, and Andrew lowered his hand. He was glad to do it, for it throbbed with pain, and the blood was falling in a quick drip to the floor. His head was reeling, and he spoke stutteringly.

"Ye are not guests of mine; ye are intruders," he cried.

Jerome tried to press him into a chair, but he resisted. "Hands off, father! I can stand."

The Spaniard made no further attempt to coerce the maddened young gentleman, but he took a kerchief from his doublet and carefully bound up the wounded limb.

"A drop of wine, son Basil, for our friend," he said.

Basil went to a cabinet, but Windybank cried out,—

"Touch nothing of mine, thou devil's cub! Dost think I would drink ought from thy hands! When wilt thou be gone, as I have bidden thee? If thou dost not quit, I will run thee through."

Jerome saw that the presence of Basil was a continual irritant to the desperate man, so he himself ordered his satellite to withdraw. Basil obeyed with no very good grace, and the look that Windybank received boded ill. Jerome now placed his victim in a cosy chair, threw open the casement that the fresh breeze from the woods might enter, and brought the glass of wine he had ordered. Master Andrew drank it, then lay back with closed eyes, his brain busy with tumultuous thought. The Spaniard sat and watched him as a wolf might watch a slumbering dog; his brain was as busy as that of the other. Was his plan doomed to failure at the last moment? If the master of Dean Tower failed him at so critical a juncture, he could not see how to proceed. More than ever did the conspirators require a place of refuge, not only for themselves, but for others whom Jerome was daily expecting.

Father Jerome got up and quietly left the room, proceeding to an ante-chamber where he knew Basil was lurking.

"Well?" asked the latter when he saw his chief.

"Thou hast been too harsh and hasty, my son. The meanest man will turn to bay if his dignity is wounded too sorely. We have found Master Windybank weak and pliable, and we have been too contemptuous of his manhood. He hath a little, and that last blow of thine has aroused it."

Basil fell on his knees in contrition. "Forgive me!" he murmured.

Jerome raised him up and gave him a perfunctory kiss on the forehead.

"We can forgive faults that arise from excess of zeal," he replied, "and we must have patience with the weak-kneed; a time will come when we shall be able to visit their sins upon them. At present we must play the loving friend; we can be the merciless judge at the opportune moment. Get thee to Gatcombe, my son. Watch the admiral well, and send the messenger thou wottest of down to Chepstow to learn if there be any tidings of our friends from Ireland. The time for action is fully come; the foresters are lulled again to security; we must strike as speedily as possible. I shall expect thee at midnight to-morrow. Meantime I will bring back our host to a sense of his duty and religion."

Basil bent one knee to receive his superior's blessing. "Benedicite!" murmured Jerome.

His subordinate seized his hand and pressed it to his lips. "I am forgiven, father?" he asked.

"Forgiven and blessed," answered Jerome. "Go! and the Holy Virgin watch over thee."

Basil pulled his hood over his face, opened a small oak door whose hinges had been generously oiled, and disappeared amongst the trees. Jerome went back to Windybank.

Chapter XI.

DARKNESS AND THE RIVER.

The hunt and its incidents were three days old.

Johnnie Morgan had been to Newnham, and had spent a whole afternoon in Dorothy's company. Not once had she snubbed him or even contradicted him. Johnnie was home again, quietly happy. There was a battle of wit and song fixed for the night at the local tavern; several "jolly dogs" had waylaid the young farmer and tried to drag him off for an evening's revelry, but he would have none of it. The sun was going down over the hills, and Johnnie sat in his parlour and watched it. His chair was tilted back against the heavy table, and his feet were on the window-ledge half shrouded in flowers. He stared at the rosy sky and dreamed dreams of the same colour.

Johnnie heard quick footsteps coming up to the porch, and immediately afterwards there was a lusty banging at the door.

"Plague take 'em!" exclaimed the contemplative youth; "I'll not go."

A little, dark-haired maiden, who, with her mother, formed the whole of the farmer's domestic establishment, came into the room.

"The admiral's man would speak with you, master," she said.

Johnnie's feet were on the floor in an instant. "Show him in," he cried.

A weather-beaten Devon man, sailor to his finger-tips, rolled into the room. The two men gripped hands.

"At last?" asked Johnnie in a low tone.

"At last!" was the reply. "Gatcombe jetty at nightfall, and well armed."

"I'll be there."

Without further words the messenger turned about and went elsewhere on his errand. Morgan at once got out his sword, put on a thick leathern doublet and boots reaching to his thighs. Then, well knowing that he might be setting out on an all-night expedition, he proceeded to eat a hasty but hearty supper.

At the appointed time he stood with about a dozen others on the river-bank. The tide was about at half-flow and running strongly; moreover, a breeze was

coming up behind it from the south-west. There was no moon, clouds were packing, and there was every sign of a pitch-dark night. The admiral's roomy boat, with its mast stepped and sail ready for hoisting, bobbed up and down on the water. Drake himself was there to receive his men.

"A rare night on the river for fish poachers, smugglers, and other nefarious rascals," said he.

"True, admiral," answered a Gatcombe pilot; "and I trow we shall find it trying work looking for black men on a black night."

"Well spoken, master pilot; but if thou canst keep our lives free of danger from shoal and sandbank, we'll e'en try to do the rest."

"I'll warrant ye safe passage anywhere 'twixt Chepstow and Gloucester, Sir Francis."

"I ask no more.—Now, gentlemen, aboard!"

In silence the chosen band seated themselves. "Take the tiller, pilot; I myself will attend to the sail. Do thou, Master Morgan, seat thyself in the bow and maintain a sharp lookout; thine eyes are younger than mine, and more used to the lights of the river." The anchor was lifted in, and immediately the boat swung round into the path of the racing waters. "Make for the other side," ordered Drake, "and lay to in the backwater under the bank."

A few deft strokes of the oars carried the boat into the rush of the tide; for an instant it hung wavering, and then shot off like an arrow up and across the roaring river. Then followed a few minutes of intense excitement. The little craft rocked and swayed, and rose and fell, tossed like a cork on the turbid waters. Morgan could scarcely see a hand's-breadth before him. The rudder creaked as the pilot moved it to and fro, and only his voice was heard as, very softly, he ordered one oarsman after another to pull or back-water in order to hold the course safely between the shallows and avoid the shifting sands, whose presence, in the darkness, no eye could descry. Morgan was kneeling in the bow, a stout pole in his hands; only once was he called upon to use it, when the nose of the boat went crunching along the slope of a sandbank for a few yards. At length came the welcome order, "Easy all!" A minute later the boat was riding on an even keel under the bank, rising and falling in rhythm with the suck and lap of the water as it devoured the soft, red-brown walls that shut it in. The heads of

the men were on a level with the strip of turf that formed the land's margin. Fifty yards back was the outer edge of a belt of dark wood that covered the flat lands and swept up the sides of the hills that lay off ten or twelve miles to the east. Against such a background nothing would be visible in the darkness. Across on the Gatcombe side were the steep sandstone cliffs, storm-washed and clean, and topped with primeval forest.

"Master Morgan," said Drake, "how far out in the stream must we lie in order that thou mayest distinguish the sail or hull of a ten-ton craft against the cliff face?"

"I can do it from here, Sir Francis. The channel is about mid-stream; and now that mine eyes are got accustomed to the dull tinge of the water, I can see the fleck and scum on the farther sand-ridge."

"Good! thou art our watch."

The admiral turned to the rest of his party. "Gentlemen," said he, "in one sense we work in the dark to-night; our foes have willed it so. Ye have come out on this errand at my bidding, asking no questions, and so, in a way, ye are groping in a double darkness. 'Tis not my way to have men follow me blindly if I can open their eyes. I want those at my back to see; by so doing they will strike the surer. Now, tidings have reached me that those Spanish rascals whom ye wot of are about to bring their plot to a head. Tomorrow night they hope to see the forest in flames." The men stirred uneasily; Drake went on: "We have had a long drought, and master-pilot will tell ye that there are strong winds coming up from the sou'-west. For to-night and to-morrow they may be dry; after that we may expect rain. Some of ye will know the *Luath* that trades between Gloucester and Waterford in Ireland. The Irish are not loyal to our Queen—that ye also know. The *Luath* came up to Chepstow on the tide this morning, and no one, unless in the secret of these Spanish villains, would dream that she carried ought but honest cargo. Her hull, gentlemen, hides four rascal priests and other desperate fellows to the full total of half a score, and much of her merchandise is tar, oils and resin, and bales of tow. The boat should wait off Chepstow for the tide that runs to-morrow forenoon before attempting the dangerous run onwards to Gloucester. She really leaves to-night. Just above Westbury she hath planned an anchorage, and there Master Windybank of Dean Tower—whom, God helping me, I will hang over his own gateway before another sunset—will meet them with pack-horses wherewith to convey the combustibles to their appointed

places. 'Tis our business to capture the *Luath*. The good knight Sir Walter Raleigh and the gallant Mayor of Newnham will see to Master Windybank and the black-garbed villains that consort with him. That is our mission; it remains for us to bring about a sure accomplishment."

"'Tis as good as done, admiral," murmured the men.

"There'll be a little tough fighting first," was the quiet reply. "Capture means death to these fellows. They are brave, and will prefer to die fighting."

The river still rose; the tide was nearing full flood, and the wind steadily increased. Soon there was water of a navigable depth above every sandbank, and there was no longer a swirl to indicate a shallow. Morgan had seen nothing; the men were getting cramped and impatient. There was now no need for the *Luath* to pick her way; she might race up anywhere between the wide banks: her chances of detection were greatly lessened.

The pilot spoke. "Saving your presence, admiral, but this Irish skipper is a deep dog. He should have passed ere now if he intends to do his business at Westbury and then make Gloucester on this tide. He suspects us."

"How so, pilot?"

"He hath not ventured to navigate the usual channels, which could be watched."

"He'll have no pilot; don't forget that."

"True; nevertheless he is behaving right cunningly."

"I never expected him to behave foolishly."

"'Sh!" Morgan's voice broke in. There was tense silence in a moment. All eyes were staring across the river. "Row out!" cried Johnnie; "they won't hear us in this wind."

After about a dozen full strokes the command came from the bow, "Cease rowing and keep her steady a moment!"

Another palpitating wait; then an excited cry from more than one voice,

"There she goes!" And the *Luath*, every thread of her brown sail taut, swept by like a greyhound, wind and wave hurrying her upstream.

Round swung the admiral's boat, up went the sail, and in a moment she was bowling along in the wake of the foe. "Put your backs into it, lads," cried Drake; "we must have her before she gets too far up the river, else will the longshore rascals get warning."

The stout foresters and fishers needed no incentive; they were rowing as well as ever Jason's Argonauts rowed, and a greater than Jason was directing them.

The yellow waters rushed and swirled and bubbled; objects drifting up on the tide were left hopelessly behind. But the stout little Irish boat had got under good headway, and for a while she kept it, looming before them a blacker patch in a black night.

Chapter XII.

SNARING A FLOCK OF NIGHT RAVENS.

At about the hour when Johnnie Morgan stepped out over his threshold to go down to the admiral at Gatcombe, Andrew Windybank stole like a thief from the Tower and went through by-paths towards Westbury-on-Severn, a fishing hamlet that lay a little farther up-stream than Newnham. Not a single man of all his servants and retainers went with him. He was clad in helmet and cuirass, and armed with sword and poniard. Although he walked stealthily, he walked firmly. Impelled by superstitious fears, avarice, and desire for revenge, he had finally thrown himself whole-heartedly into the Spanish plot. He had found it impossible to hold out against Jerome and Basil, for, had he withstood them, they would have killed him without mercy. Therefore, being implicated hopelessly with them and their schemes, he determined, wisely, to use no half-measures and thus court defeat and disaster, but to strive to his uttermost for the success of their plans, treasonable and dishonourable though he knew them to be. "May as well be hanged for a royal stag as for lesser game," said Master Windybank; and as he said it he felt his neck grow uncomfortable. He plucked at

his doublet, found it quite loose, swore at himself for an imaginative fool, and hurried on his way.

The wood was almost passed; the trees were thin, and the steep of the hill was merging into the level of the plain. Master Andrew could hear the faint roar of the running tide. Nowhere along the river could a light be seen. From wood to wood across the wide waterway all was a black hollow, not even the yellow of the half-covered sands showing a tinge of colour through the thick darkness. "A mirky night for a mirky deed," whispered the young man. "Father Jerome hath chosen well." He resumed his walk, turning north towards the cliff at Westbury. The darkness and the sense of security had heightened his courage; he stepped out boldly and without hesitation. All at once he was conscious that some one was near him. Hardly had he realized this presence when a hand was laid in a familiar fashion on his arm. "Thy feet are swift in the good cause," said a voice; "thus do men step to victory!"

Basil! Windybank felt uncomfortable at once. Had the fellow been dogging his steps from the Tower? He moved more stealthily than the night itself, and one never felt free of his presence.

The two walked on side by side, never exchanging another word; indeed Windybank made no reply to Basil's remark. They came out on the river-side path that ran from Newnham to Westbury around the great horseshoe sweep of the river. The shallow wavelets of the advancing tide were already lapping at the soft, red bank on their right. On their left was a ditch; behind that, an embankment topped by a tall hedge; beyond that, orchards and fields stretching away to forest and hill. The two conspirators crept along in the shadow of the hedge. Half a mile farther on was the rendezvous. A faint light coming from the foam-topped water made the blackness near its margin seem less intense, and presently Windybank saw three figures ahead of him silhouetted against the stretch of river. He plucked Basil by the sleeve, and the fanatic came to a dead stop instantly.

"Friends or foes?" whispered the young forester.

"No foe would walk so openly to our meeting-place," replied the other, "and no friend should risk discovery so stupidly. I'll hurry after them and teach them discretion."

The ex-monk crouched down and ran almost on all fours like a dog. The pace at which he went in so strained a position opened Windybank's eyes. "The fellow's more beast than man," he thought, "and his muscular strength is marvellous." He went on to the appointed place alone and slowly, seeing nothing of Basil or the three others until he got there.

About a dozen men were assembled, and Windybank gathered from their whispers that they were from the northern part of the forest or from beyond the Wye; neither Father Jerome nor his other lieutenant, John, was present. Windybank stretched himself on the grass just above the water, being determined to say nothing to any man. He fell to contemplating the tall spire of Westbury Church, which stood out like a blurred finger in the darkness. Meanwhile the tide ran strongly.

A boat came across from the eastern side of the river. Father Jerome and five men stepped out, and the boat was tied up under the bank. The Jesuit asked for "Master Windybank," and Andrew stood up. "Your leader, friends, if it comes to fighting," said Jerome quietly. Windybank bowed; he had not anticipated such an honour, and he certainly did not want it; there was too much danger about it.

"Where is John?"

Basil answered. "Gone to meet the company that rides from Gloucester."

Nearly half an hour went by, a time of dead silence and anxious watching. Some of the less eager conspirators began to feel the demoralizing effects of the long wait; their courage began to ebb. Andrew Windybank had time to reflect, and he wished himself well out of the whole business. Here and there a man sighed or fidgeted in the darkness. Basil was quick to notice the signs, and equally quick to combat them. He whispered words of hope and promise, and stimulated the nagging ones to fresh zeal.

A muffled sound of hoofs—the men from Gloucester! Windybank noted with some degree of satisfaction that they ware well armed and well mounted. In the darkness he counted nearly a score of men. A few were "riff-raff;" some, like himself, were perhaps forced; but the majority seemed to be of some substance and courage. Prospects were looking brighter. Master Andrew ventured to ask Basil a question. "What of the Irish ship?"

"The *Luath* will not fail us; she is almost due."

"It is possible that she may pass the cliff in the darkness," put in a bystander. "Mine eyes are good, but I cannot see mid-stream, and a boat that carries no lights may easily slip by unseeing and unseen."

"That is our greatest risk, my son," admitted Basil. "But if the *Luath* is to escape other prying eyes, we must take the chance against ourselves. One thing, we know when and where to expect her, and the captain will steer inshore after passing Newnham, because of the deeper channel being this side. I don't think we shall miss her."

Father Jerome utilized the minutes in slipping from man to man and giving each a fixed duty to perform the moment the *Luath* should come to anchor under the bank. He seemed to have forgotten nothing; ropes were ready for the tying up of the vessel and the hauling ashore of the cargo in cradles that the skipper would have aboard with him. The horses from the city were designed for duty as pack-horses, by means of which combustibles would be conveyed to divers parts of the forest and hidden whilst the darkness lasted. Finally, the boat that had brought Father Jerome and the contingent from the Arlingham side would drift down-stream on the ebb with materials for giving the fire a good start round Awre and Blakeney.

"Ha!"—the exclamation came in a strained whisper from a dozen throats. A black shape loomed up out of the darkness, and was recognized by more than one for the *Luath*. The ship swung towards the cliff, and the men stood ready to drop the anchor. There was a soft call of "Ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" answered Basil. In an instant every conspirator was alert and afoot. Father Jerome rubbed his hands with undisguised glee, and Andrew Windybank felt a great weight drop from his heart. He had now no doubt of success for the night's venture. The *Luath* was safe and to time, and many hours of darkness were yet before them. He had not expected that things would go so smoothly. He saw visions of satisfied revenge dancing before him like "Jack-o'-lanthorns." His spirits were of that sort that are easily elated or depressed. Now they bounded up like a liberated balloon.

But another black shape crept up-stream—a small black shape. And from this came, not a faint call, but a rousing shout of:—

"St. George and the Heart of Oak!"

Chapter XIII.

A DOUBLE FIGHT.

The fierce, challenging shout from the river seemed to split the thick darkness as a wedge might split a tree. For a few seconds only was there a following silence, in which the conspirators stood rooted in astonishment; then from the very hedge that fringed the river-path came another cry, "The Dragon and the Lion!" The veriest fool that hung round Father Jerome knew that these cries could be naught but answering signals. They were trapped. The rushing river lay before them, a line of enemies stood behind, and the darkness was such that no man could tell friend from foe at the distance of a dozen paces.

The anchor of the *Luath* dropped to the deck again with a dull clang. Hands went to the freeing of the sails, and the tiller swung round to bring the vessel out of the backwater beneath the cliff into the full run of the tideway.

"Shoot!" ordered a rough voice (the admiral's) from the boat. A shower of arrows whistled over the heads of the group on land, and stuck, quivering, into ship or sailor. This sign of perfect agreement between the forces at the rear and on the river decided some of the plotters. The admiral evidently had known all, and was prepared with a perfect counterplot. The only chance of safety lay in flight—and they fled.

But Father Jerome was not beaten. His weapon was out, and Basil's and John's followed immediately.

"We fight for it, my sons," he cried. "The ship can hold her own and help us too; there are fifty bold fellows aboard her." His voice rang out clearly and resolutely, and the captain of the *Luath* responded. "'Tis but a boat-load to beat off," he said.

But Francis Drake led the boat-load. Under cover of the darkness and the flight of arrows from the bank he had brought his boat under the lee of the Irish vessel, and, closely followed by Johnnie Morgan, was swarming up her side. A

stirring shout of "Strike for the Queen, my lads!" told Raleigh that the admiral was aboard. The next moment Sir Walter, Captain Dawe, and a dozen bold fellows from Newnham swarmed through the hedge and down the bank, and dashed upon Jerome and his men.

"Cut them down, lads!" cried Raleigh. "Every one is a priest of Spain or a traitor; don't spare the vermin!"

The din and clamour ashore and afloat—the cries, curses, clash of weapons, and groans of the wounded—turned midnight and darkness into an hour of pandemonium. The shore fight was short, for, though the three chief conspirators and Windybank fought desperately enough, the rank and file seemed more anxious to save their skins than do aught else. They dared not ask for quarter after Raleigh's order—'twas fight to the death, or fly. The men from Gloucester moved at once to their horses, and some of them managed to spring into the saddle and get off in the darkness. The rough foresters were poorly armed and ill prepared for fighting; for the most part those who stood were cut down like sheep, and paid the full penalty of their treason. Basil endeavoured to single out Raleigh, and Father Jerome did the same; but one cloaked man is very like another at midnight, and there were tall fellows amongst the Newnham lads that could stand shoulder to shoulder with the famous knight. Windybank hoped to get a thrust at Morgan; and now that his blood was up, and he had resolved to sell his life dearly, he was chagrined to find no sign of the hated foe. He did not suspect that Johnnie was with the admiral on the river.

Meanwhile there was a fiercer struggle on the *Luath*. The crew and the men stowed in hiding beneath the hatches were either Irish or Spanish, all friends of the Pope and King Philip, and inveterate foes of England's Queen and faith. Moreover, they were well armed and could fight stoutly. The ship's decks were soon slippery with blood and cumbered with dead and wounded. Twice the admiral was beaten back to the bulwarks and almost over the side. His force was hardly great enough for the task that confronted it; indeed, the astute seaman had, for once, underestimated both the numbers and the courage of his foe. He cheered his little company with voice and example.

"Foot to foot with me, lads!" he cried. "The honour of England is at stake. Shall Dons and Irish beat us on our own rivers? Well thrust, Master Morgan! Now, a rush together, boys! Ha! they give; the dogs give!"

So, under the pall of night on the swirling waters, the fight went on. Now the gallant captain of the *Luath* was exultant, the next moment the admiral had the advantage; backwards and forwards swung the balance of conflict. A loud "hurrah!" from the shore, a great shout of "victory," cries of "Drive them into the river!" showed how matters had gone between Raleigh and Father Jerome. The news heartened the admiral and demoralized the conspirators on the ship. The vessel itself, rocking to and fro, refusing to obey the helmsman, lurched from the quiet backwater into the swirl of the racing current. She swung half round, pitched and rolled dangerously, and then went up-stream like a drunken thing, swaying, turning, threatening to rush for cliff or sandbank, and endangering the life of every soul on board. The valiant skipper saw and felt the imminent peril, and, sailor-like, sprang himself to the helm and headed the staunch little ship along the safe channel. Then he gave her over to the helmsman again with some whispered instructions, and sprang back into the fight that had not slackened because of the chances of shipwreck. But the sense of doubled danger soon told its tale. The Spanish allies, strangers to the river, lost their heads, unnerved by the blackness of the night and the apparently ungoverned course along the tide. Raleigh and his victorious men were running along the bank and cheering the admiral. The captain of the *Luath* took a desperate chance. He blew a call on a whistle that hung on his neck. It was a signal to the helmsman, who turned the nose of the ship across stream to the eastern shore. Diagonally the vessel steered to destruction; she just cleared the sand-ridge in the centre of the river, and then went crash into the bank.

"Save yourselves," cried the skipper, and those of his men who could jumped into the waters and struggled to land. "I fight to the last," cried the gallant Irishman, when those who cared to run for life had had their chance; and the braver ones amongst his men came in a ring about him, and fought on until struck down. Drake offered them quarter, but they proudly refused it. "No rope for my neck!" cried the captain; and his men cheered his resolve, and died fighting beside him.

Chapter XIV.

WHAT HAPPENED IN WESTBURY STEEPLE.

The battle was over, and there remained but the counting of the cost. The admiral had lost a third of his force, who lay dead on the deck, or on the shifting sands beneath the yellow tide. There was hardly a man that had not received a wound. Johnnie Morgan had gone down under the last wild-cat spring of the Irish captain.

"We must have a light," cried Drake; "this vessel is a firebrand. Some of you fetch up combustibles from below."

The ship was stuck fast into the bank, the tide pounding her viciously as she lay. In a short while a fire was roaring on the Arlingham bank, and by its glare the deck was cleared of its ghastly burden, and the wounded attended to. Hallooing across the river, Drake ordered those on the other side to secure boats from somewhere, and come across stream to render him assistance. Messengers went off to the neighbouring farms to bring carts and mattresses and stuff for bandaging; for the tale of wounded, friend and foe, was a long one. Willing hands and legs went to work, but it was bright morning ere much assistance arrived. Johnnie Morgan was not seriously wounded. A sword-cut on the head had stunned him for a while, and now laid him, sick, dizzy, and bleeding, on the bank; but he was able to tell the admiral that he felt nothing but a "plaguy bad headache."

We will leave him cooling in the dewy morning, and see what has become of Master Windybank and some of those associated with him. The master of Dean Tower, deeming his treachery well known, and not reckoning upon any chance of life if he fell into the admiral's hands, rose to the height of a desperate occasion, and fought in so resolute a fashion that he was not outdone by the tigerish Basil or the cold-blooded Jerome. The arch-plotter, who kept by the side of his untrustworthy recruit, was astonished at the reckless valour he displayed. Truth to tell, Jerome was half inclined to believe that Windybank had played a double part, and was responsible for the admiral's knowledge of the plot for unlading the *Luath*.

Entertaining such a notion, he was watching Master Andrew closely; and had he detected any signs of half-heartedness, or any movement towards escape, he would have run the young man through the body without hesitation. But the suspected one proved, for the nonce, a leader that would have led stouter-hearted fellows to victory; and Father Jerome, seeing the fight was hopeless, determined to give Windybank a chance of further life and usefulness in the Spanish cause.

He slowly gave way in the direction of the river, and whispered his companion to do likewise.

"Skin whole?" he asked.

"Ay," panted Andrew.

"Fall into the river as though badly wounded, and try to save thyself. I shall do the same. Leave Basil and John to fight this out."

A moment later Windybank toppled backwards into the stream. He was a good swimmer, else had the Jesuit's advice availed him nothing, and he rose to the surface and turned over on to his breast like a porpoise. He fixed his sword between his teeth, and left himself to the rush of the tide, putting in a few strokes now and then in order to keep a proper course. A short time sufficed to put him out of the area of actual conflict, and he rested himself for a moment to consider what was best for him to do. He did not suppose that his foes would put an escape to his credit, for his voice had been heard loudly enough in the fight until the waters had closed above him. He determined to essay the crossing of the river, as giving him the better chance of a run for liberty, but he found the task beyond him; the fighting had fatigued him, and the current ran like a mill-race. For the present, at any rate, he must remain on his own side of the Severn. He swam a little farther up-stream, then made for a place where the bank was low, and scrambled out. For a while he waited to see whether Father Jerome had followed him. Getting no signs of his leader, he turned to the pressing question of his own immediate safety. He quickly decided not to seek any hiding-place in the forest; the river offered a better channel for escape. If he could secrete himself for a while, a chance would offer itself of running down on the tide after nightfall. It would not be difficult to find a boat, and the Welsh coast of the estuary should afford him a safe asylum until he could make fuller plans concerning his future. The voyage would be a perilous one, but he saw no other chance of escaping capture and death.

The gray cottages of Westbury were before him, backed by the church and its tall spire. A thought flashed across his mind like an inspiration: his riverside hiding-place was found! The spire was isolated from the church, and was entirely of wood, save for a stone stump. Great beams crossed and recrossed one another, in an ever-narrowing pyramid, for about two hundred feet. Up in the dimness and final darkness near the apex was security for any man.

Windybank stole across the river meadow to the nearest house. The door stood open and the place was empty. The neighbouring house was in like condition, and a quick survey told him that the fisher-folk, hearing sounds of the fight, had gone down to learn what strange business was adoing at midnight. Master Andrew was deficient neither in caution nor in cunning. He acted promptly. A pantry was visited, and a loaf of bread abstracted. He slipped from the house and passed through the orchard. He stuffed his pockets with half-ripe apples; they would help to quench his thirst, and he could hope for no water in his lofty place of concealment.

He got to the churchyard wicket, passed through, floundered over the melancholy mounds that strewed God's acre, and reached the square, stone stump upon which the wooden spire was reared, and in which hung the bells. The door was on the latch, the lower part of the belfry being used as a storehouse for odds and ends of stone, wood, and rope belonging to the church itself. Windybank knew his bearings fairly well. He found the staircase, and began to wend upwards to the bell-chamber. About twenty feet up he felt a rush of cool, river air, and he knew that he had passed the first lattice. A little later, and he was on the belfry floor, his hands feeling the chill, smooth surface of the largest bell. Aching with fatigue and excitement, he sat down. He did not propose to attempt the perilous climb upwards in the darkness, and daylight could not be far off. Hunger sent in its claims; he broke the loaf, and munched a couple of sour apples. The food refreshed him, and he felt he could wait patiently for the dawn.

Day came, and with it a buzz of excitement in the village. Windybank ventured to peep through the topmost lattice and scan the groups of excited gossips. Then he looked aloft through the great network of beams and rafters. He was tired, and his brain swam inside his head. The apex of the spire looked fearfully high and dark, and the brown, cobwebbed maze of woodwork bewildered him. The latch below clicked; some one was in the lower tower. The great bell began to swing; the sexton was ringing an alarm. Seized by a sudden fright, Windybank clambered by a bell-wheel to the first huge beam. He got his fingers on it and swung his body across. He gained the next, and the next; he was twenty feet above the floor of the bell-chamber. The boom of the bell was deafening. He paused for breath, and then hurried on his upward way, slipping sometimes, but never falling.

Suddenly the bell stopped; a deep hum of sound spun and echoed in the narrowing cone where Windybank was giddily clinging. He had paused again to

recover breath and stability. Looking down, he saw a head rising from the tower steps into the bell-chamber; the sexton had come up to readjust the rope. The fugitive's guilty conscience put another meaning upon his act; he felt sure that signs of his presence had been noted, and that the fellow had come up to search for him. A little way above him was darkness and security. He turned quickly to make a last noiseless dash, but he missed his grip and his footing. For a moment he hung, while his heart stood still. Then he fell with sickening thud and crash from beam to beam. The startled sexton looked up and cried out; and the traitor's body toppled in its last wild spin, and fell at his feet. He lifted it up. The face was beaten almost out of recognition, and the neck was broken.

The receding tide left Father Jerome's body on the sands. He delayed his plunge into the river a moment too long, and a thrust from Raleigh's sword speeded him into the yellow waters. John was found on the bank, dead likewise. Basil's body was searched for in vain. He was accounted as dead, for men protested stoutly that they had wounded him more than once. But a scotched viper does not always die. Gatcombe men were destined to prove the truth of that.

Chapter XV.

A LETTER FROM COURT.

Affairs in the forest had settled down; "excursions and alarums" were no longer the order of the day and the dread of the night. Wounded men were healed of the hurts gotten in the fray with the conspirators, and their whole-skinned neighbours had ceased to ask them how they did and envy them the marks of patriotic valour that they carried on their bodies. The dead were buried, and the tears of wives, mothers, and sisters were dried, and sad memories—when they came—called up only a sigh of resignation: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away!" They humbly thanked the Lord that He had given their men honourable passage into the next world.

The admiral was no longer at Gatcombe, but had gone to London, and thence to Plymouth. Raleigh had gone to London with him, and in London had he

stayed. After the solitude of the forest, the gaiety of the court attracted him strongly; and, as her most gracious Majesty was disposed to smile upon him, he had said to Drake, "The sun shines, Frank; beshrew me if I stray out of the circle of its warm rays." To which the seaman replied, "God forgive thee, Wat, for dancing so much after a woman's heels. The sea—as I know full well—can be treacherous, but I serve a less fickle mistress than thou."

Raleigh laughed lightly, kissed the storm-roughened cheek of his friend, and bade him God-speed. "What would our royal mistress say if she heard thee call her 'fickle'?" he whispered.

"I am not fool enough, Wat, to speak such words in her hearing. But have a care—courts are slippery places in which to walk. An honest man is safer on a ship's deck during a hurricane than on a palace floor even when the royal sun is shining. Have a care of thyself, dear heart, if only for the sake of us rough sea-dogs of Devon that love thee."

Whereupon Raleigh kissed the admiral again, and sent loving messages to Jack Hawkins and Dick Grenville and all the other gallant gentlemen that quaffed their ale with eyes on the sea on Plymouth Hoe.

Johnnie Morgan stood watching the last wagon from his harvest field go creaking and groaning into the rickyard in the rear of his house. It was quite early in the afternoon, and the September sun shone with an ardour worthy of fierce July. There was a wind, but it came dead from the south, and its passage across the hot, moist sands of the river had no cooling influence upon it. Johnnie mopped his brow and leant wearily upon a pitchfork whilst a maiden ran indoors for a flagon of cider. She came back, followed closely by a dusty stranger.

The farmer stared at the stranger. The latter surveyed Johnnie pretty coolly, measured him from head to heel, and then took off his hat with a sweeping forward movement of the arm. "By the look of thee thou art Master Morgan, the yeoman of Blakeney, for whom I have hunted high and low since noon," he exclaimed.

"I am Master Morgan," replied Johnnie; "who art thou?"

"Timothy Jeffreys, at your service. I serve the good knight, Sir Walter Raleigh."

"Say no more until thy throat be better moistened," cried Morgan, handing him the flagon of cider. "Let it never be said that a message from the noble Sir Walter was spoken to me with dry lips."

Master Jeffreys took the cider off at a draught. "Passable—on a hot day, palatable—to a man thirsty enough to lap from a wayside ditch; but—!" he shook his head expressively, "'tis not Devonshire juice, Master Morgan."

"True; 'tis good Glo'stershire, and we humble forest folk keep sound heads and sound stomachs by quaffing it. I'm sorry 'tis not to your liking; maybe I should cry 'faugh!' over your Devonshire tipple, good sir." Johnnie was annoyed, for he prided himself on his apple-brew, and the airs and graces of Master Jeffreys were not altogether to his liking. "You have a message to me," he said. "No doubt you will tell it better sitting than standing. Come into my parlour.—Meg, take this gentleman's cloak and dust it, and bring him a brush for his boots." The maid took the horseman's cloak, and her master led his guest indoors. Meg was ready on the threshold to brush off the heavy coating of red, forest dust.

"Bachelor?" asked Jeffreys when he found himself lying back in a cosy chair, a bowl of sweet, old-time flowers adjacent to his nose.

"Bachelor!" answered Johnnie.

"Pardon my question; but this room is so trim and neat that, methought, there must be some dainty housewife under the roof."

"And thou wert curious to see her."

"Exactly. I have travelled, Master Morgan, and I love to look about me and ponder upon what I see."

"Thy conclusions are not always correct."

"The wisest men make mistakes, Master Morgan."

"What a comfort to us that are fools!" ejaculated the forester. "But thy message, my good sir."

"I like thy house; 'tis uncommon pretty."

"A good enough nest," assented Morgan.

"Wants another bird in it."

"True!"

"Thou hast no thought of quitting the homestead?"

"Heaven forbid! 'twas my father's before me. I'll never leave it."

"That's a pity."

"How so?"

"I've come down to fetch thee away."

Johnnie was losing patience with his visitor. His thoughts were busy with the rick-makers in the yard, and Master Jeffreys was in no hurry to say his say and be gone. He gave himself more airs than the knight his master. "Sit and rest thyself," exclaimed the farmer, getting up. "I can see that thy story will keep another hour. I'll send the wench into thee with some ale and venison. Eat and drink and take thine ease until I come to thee again." Without another word he vanished.

"A hasty fellow," commented Master Jeffreys. "A few trees and a muddy river make up his world. A winter in London will open his eyes and give him a broader view of life; then he will behave in a more leisured manner."

Johnnie saw to the unlading of his last wagon and the shaping off of his wheat-rick. Then he went indoors again, and found his visitor ready to deliver his message without any more beating about the bush. It was short, but pointed. Jeffreys—who described himself as a poor gentleman of Devon attached to the fortunes of his more famous neighbour—was instructed to invite, or rather command, Master Morgan's presence in London. Raleigh had spoken of him to the Queen, and the admiral had also written concerning him. Her Majesty was anxious to see the valiant forester, and Jeffreys duly impressed upon him the necessity of seizing so glorious a chance to push his fortunes.

But Morgan was not so eager; in fact, he told the messenger that, much as he loved Raleigh and honoured the Queen, he did not propose to venture into

London. Jeffreys argued. Morgan was firm. "I'll not come except at the direct command of the good Sir Walter or the Queen. If I am left any choice in the matter, I choose to abide in the forest."

"Very well," said Jeffreys, "then I'll be going. My steed will be rested. Canst give me a guide to Newnham? I want a Captain Dawe."

"Ah!" cried Johnnie, all ears in a moment.

"The knight hath commissioned me to deliver a letter to a Mistress Dorothy Dawe."

"Then I'll get me out of my workday suit and walk to Newnham with thee," exclaimed the farmer. "There's nought so refreshing as a tramp along the shaded, woodland ways, and I have a little business of mine own to do with Captain Dawe. I shall serve thee and myself at the same time." So much the yeoman said aloud. Inwardly he muttered, "I'll not have this bowing and scraping image ducking and bobbing before my Dolly, and sniffing round her parlour like a dog that hopes to start some quarry from behind chair or table. He'll be in luck if his message-carrying doesn't get him a cracked crown. I hope the knight hath not many such as he in his train."

Jeffreys stared when his guide came again into the sunny parlour prepared for his walk to Newnham. The rough farmer in hodden gray had disappeared, and in his place stood a stalwart and handsome young gentleman in green slashed doublet and hosen of soft cream cloth. A green cap with a white swan's feather perched jauntily on the dark, curling hair, and from a belt of pale buckskin hung a sword with a delicately chased handle. The "poor gentleman of Devon" fresh from London and the court felt as gay as a dusty barndoor fowl might feel beside a lordly peacock.

"La! Master Morgan," he cried, "I'm glad thou hast no mind for London in my company. In good sooth, I've no wish to walk down Chepe or Whitehall with thee at my elbow. Ne'er a wench would give an eye to me. Even through the forest, with nought save the birds and beasts to quiz at us, I think I'll come along humbly in the rear with my cap in my hand. You foresters go a-visiting in as smart a guise as a town gallant goes to the play. Dost mind if I wash my face, comb my locks, and have another brushing ere we set forth?"

"Ha' done with thy jesting, good sir; thou art a traveller from afar, and lookest the part to perfection. I am at mine ease at home going to pay a call to a pretty neighbour. Let us be jogging; 'tis a long walk to Newnham, and the afternoon is wearing late."

The two young men set out for the little river town. Morgan at first had little to say, and let his companion rattle on as he pleased about London—its streets, shops, taverns, and theatres. But, by-and-by, he became eager over the wild beauties of river and forest, and he told tales of cave and cliff and pool, of boar and deer, pirate and fisherman, and forced Master Jeffreys to listen. And so they got to Newnham and the pretty cottage with fair flowers outside and a fairer flower within. "This is Captain Dawe's house," said Johnnie.

"I thank thee heartily. I can knock and introduce myself and mine errand, and leave thee free to go at once to the pretty maid in whose honour thou hast decked thyself so gallantly."

"Trouble not thyself, Master Jeffreys; I shall do my business the better by coming in to quicken thine. Follow me; I am in the habit of entering this house without going through the ceremony of knocking." Saying this, the forester lifted the latch and stood aside for his companion to cross the threshold first. A sound

of singing came from the kitchen.

"A pretty bird in a pretty cage," said Jeffreys.

"E'en so," commented Morgan; "thine eyes and ears are passably good for a townsman. Pardon me leaving thee for a moment."

Morgan strode off kitchenwards. There was a sudden, "La, Jack! thou dost look like a feast day. Mind the flour!" After that Jeffreys always declared that he heard the sound of a vigorous kiss. Silence followed; then excited whisperings; then a scamper of light feet; and Morgan returned and ushered his waiting companion into the parlour. "Captain Dawe is down by the river," he said; "Mistress Dorothy will be with us anon."

"And the pretty bird that sang in the kitchen over the flour tub?"

"Was Mistress Dorothy."

"Thy sleeve is whitened, Master Morgan."

Johnnie coolly brushed away the tell-tale smudge. "Women always smother a room up on baking-day," he replied.

Dorothy came in.

"This is Sir Walter's man, who hath a packet for thee.—Master Jeffreys, this is Mistress Dawe."

Dorothy curtsied, and the messenger bowed. "Never had long journey so pretty and pleasant an ending," he said. "Here is a packet from my master, the gallant knight Sir Walter Raleigh. I am to take back an answer."

Dorothy took the packet, blushing at the sight of the pretty ribbons wherewith it was tied. "I am honoured indeed," she murmured; "pray you be seated, fair sir."

Chapter XVI.

TO LONDON TOWN.

The packet that Master Jeffreys handed to Dorothy was too large and too heavy for a mere missive; and the maid, recalling some jocular promises of Raleigh's, at once suspected that some London gew-gaw lay snug within, and tore off the wrappings with eager fingers. Her hopes were not disappointed, and a dainty pair of silver shoebuckles shone in the sunlight.

"Dear heart alive! surely they are not for me," cried Dolly.

"Read the letter, mistress," said Jeffreys.

A knot of blue ribbon was the only seal on the knight's letter, and the blushing maiden opened and read; and, as she read, the rich colour of her cheeks grew ever richer and deeper, and Johnnie pulled his cap-feather to pieces and watched her. She finished, sighed, looked at her lover and at the writer's messenger, then, with a "By your leave, Master Jeffreys," she handed the missive to Johnnie. "Read," she said.

"Nay, why should I?" was the somewhat sheepish response.

"Because I wish it," said Dolly promptly.

"I am bad at reading script; each one hath too much of his own fashion in the twists and curls of the letters."

"This is as plain as Bible print. Art going to London?"

"No!"

Dolly's face fell. "Hath not Master Jeffreys given thee Sir Walter's message?"

"Ay, and I have sent back a civil and courteous 'No.' What should I do in such a place?"

"What a question for a fellow of spirit to ask!" cried Dolly.

"What a question, indeed!" echoed Jeffreys; "and a sweet maid with her toes

tingling to tread the golden pavements! Read, Master Morgan; the gallant knight's words will speak more persuasively than my poor tongue."

Johnnie took the letter, and read as follows:—

"To MISTRESSE DAWE. Bye ye hande of my trustie manne, Timothie Jeffreys—Greetynges to you, faire mistresse, and to youre excellent and honourable sire.

"To-daye, a softe wind hath come up from ye west, tempering ye heate and broil of ye towne, and whisperynge to me of cool forest glades and greene paths bye a rushynge river. Straightwaie closynge mine eyen to gette a cleare vision of ye same, I am minded of deare friendes whose feete have kept time with mine along ye shaded wayes. Here, before me on my table, hathe my servante placed freshe flowres from countrie hedgerowe and garden, to sweeten the close aire that cometh in from ye swelterynge streetes. And, straightwaie, I bethinke me how sweete this olde citie would be if onlie Ye Rose of Dean Forest would come hither with her coloure and her perfume!

"Soe, gentle mistresse and deare friende, I am, on ye sudden, hasting to do what I have purposed for many dayes. Her Majestie hathe a desire to see a certaine gallant youthe that dwelleth hard bye ye rivere atte Blakeney, and I have a desire to showe a pretty maiden ye sightes of London towne, of the whiche we spoke many a time in ye cool of ye forest. Therefore, come away with brave Master Morgan and youre estimable father, ye captaine. My manne will guide you, and I will welcome you righte heartilie. In assurance that you will come, I shall bespeake lodgynges with a worthie dame of my acquaintance. Persuade Master Morgan; it will be for his certaine goode. I shall command him bye worde of mouthe; but as I knowe the rogue—though merrie enough in some wayes and eager for travel—is rooted on Severne side like an oak, 'twill neede some powere like thine to move him.

"Commende me and my invitation to youre sire; accepte a triflynge gift at my handes; and may God be with you all and give us a joyouse meetynge.—Youres, in all knightlie devoirs, WALTER RALEIGH."

Johnnie handed the letter back.

"Well?" asked Dorothy.

"I do not think your father will consent; 'tis a perilous journey for a maid."

"Not when three brave gentlemen ride with her."

"I like not the scheme. What is London to home-dwelling forest folk?"

"'Tis the heart of the world," broke in Jeffreys, "and no man can say he knoweth life until he hath felt the pulse-beat of the great city."

"I am woodland bred, good sir, and shrink from the prisonment of streets and walls. Half a day in Gloucester makes me fret like a caged bird."

"A man must see life in its many aspects if he would claim to have lived at all, Master Morgan."

"I do not agree. A man will see deeper into a stream if he sits and watches than will a fellow who splashes noisily about. However, I am bounden to Mistress Dorothy by a hundred acts of kindness that she did me when I lay fevered and with a broken head. If her heart is set upon this jaunt, and her father does not say 'Nay,' I'll to London or anywhere else she wills. Nevertheless, for my own liking, I had rather bide at home."

Dorothy beamed at the forester. "I was half tempted to remind thee that thou didst owe me a mended head. I am glad I did not," she said.

"There is no need to remind me of even a look thou hast given me," replied Johnnie. "But here comes the captain; his word will be law to us in this matter."

Captain Dawe came in, and welcomed Master Jeffreys most heartily when he learned whom he served. His brow puckered, however, over the knight's letter.

"What dost thou say to the project?" he asked Morgan.

"I am pledged to do as Dorothy wishes."

"And thy wish, my lass?"

"Is to go to London."

"I might have guessed that without troubling to ask. My bones are getting old, and 'tis a long ride."

"We will go at your own pace, father."

"I must think on't; 'tis no light matter for a simple man like myself."

Captain Dawe thought over the matter for a night and a day, and he consulted half Newnham before he arrived at a decision. He made up his mind to go. Then came manifold preparations. Clothing and arms received careful attention. Dolly's best gowns came out of lavender, and Morgan set the tailor busy upon new doublet and hosen. Master Jeffreys lodged with the captain, and gave all the benefit of his impartial advice. The knight's man was a personage in Newnham for more than a week, and he carried off the dignity in excellent style. Johnnie bought Dorothy a stout saddle horse to replace the forest pony she usually rode; and at last, on a sunny morning, the little cavalcade rode along the river-path towards Gloucester. Several friends and neighbours went with them as far as the city.

They rested that night in Northleach, over the other side of the hills. Thence they went through Burford to Oxford; afterwards riding in easy daily stages through Wycombe and Uxbridge to London town. Halting for a last time at Mary-le-bone, a few miles from the city gates, where they cleansed themselves from the dust and soil of travelling, they rode thence to Charing, along the Strand past Alsatia, the Temple, and Whitefriars, and, crossing the Fleet River, entered the city by the Lud Gate, St. Paul's great church looking down on them from the hilltop.

Master Jeffreys halted finally at the "Swanne," in Wood Street off the Chepe.

Chapter XVII

SIR WALTER AS CHAPERON.

That same evening the Devonshire knight, apprised by Master Jeffreys of the arrival of his forest friends, paid them a visit in the Wood Street hostelry. He himself had lodgings at Whitehall, near to the court. He welcomed them most warmly, paid Dorothy many pretty compliments, and enjoined the hostess to have the greatest care of her precious charge.

"Let but a hair of Mistress Dawe be injured beneath thy roof, goodwife," said he, with a twinkle in his eye, "and a whole host of wild fellows from caves and holes in the mighty forest will swarm hither for revenge. Dark, terrible beings are they, who spend much of their time in the gloomy depths of the mighty woodland or in the very bowels of the earth. Wild Irish or Spaniards are nought to them. I have seen them eat up such folk at a mouthful! This nymph is their maiden queen. Have a care how ye all treat her!"

The plump hostess, who knew her knight for a merry jester, was yet half inclined to believe his account of the forest dwellers, and she looked with added interest upon the blushing Dolly. Master Morgan was quite to her mind.

"I am a widow," she said in confidence to the captain, "and 'tis a great comfort to have a fellow of so many inches, and an honest face atop of them, under one's roof."

The captain agreed, and accepted the invitation of Mistress Stowe (the hostess) to drink a cup of sack with her in her own parlour.

Sir Walter left his man with the forest folk in the capacity of guide and counsellor, promising to come again early on the morrow and take them the round of the city sights. Johnnie went abroad that evening, down Chepe as far as Cornhill; but Dorothy and the captain preferred to remain indoors, and Mistress Stowe entertained them with stories of the great city, telling of the great changes that had taken place of late years—how scores of churches and religious houses had been pulled down and hundreds of priests and monks driven out because of the Reformation.

"I have heard my father say," she declared, "that in his time every second man you met with in the streets of London was monk or priest; churches stood everywhere, and there was a perpetual ding-dong of bells from morn till night. Now you will look in vain for a monk; the bells are grown silent; and the churches are heaps of ruins, or their sites occupied by warehouses built of their

stones. The monasteries and nunneries are turned into dwelling-places for the rich folk and favourites of the court."

She told them of the tournaments held in the great street called "Chepe;" of the pageants on the river; the bull-baiting, bear-baiting, and morris-dancing, and the plays at the theatres. She had an entranced audience of two until Morgan and Jeffreys returned from their ramble.

The next morning about eleven o'clock Sir Walter came in and found the dinner just served, so he dined with his friends; and then, after a pipe of tobacco —in which neither the captain nor Morgan ventured to join him—he took them abroad. Down Chepe they went, past the fine shops of goldsmith, silversmith, and mercer. The broad thoroughfare was thronged with gaily-dressed people, afoot and on horseback, and the apprentices cried their masters' wares so lustily that the place rang again. 'Twas "What d'ye lack, pretty mistress? Is it gold or jewels, fal-lals or laces? Buy, buy, gallant sirs; knick-knacks, pretty things, and gew-gaws for the lady!"

"Bones o' me!" gasped Johnnie, as he wriggled from the clutches of two persevering apprentices; "an I had the fee-simple of my scrap of land in the forest in my pocket, these rogues would have it from me in an afternoon walk. What wouldst thou like, Dolly? Let me buy thee something."

But Dorothy, who was just in front leaning on the knight's arm, had eyes more for the crowd than for the brave things displayed in the shops. Gallant after gallant bowed gracefully to her, for all knew the famous knight; and the ladies eyed her keenly and critically, wondering who she might be. It was a proud day for Dorothy. She was quick enough to notice that her clothing was not quite according to London fashions; but if she were not as gaily dressed as the ladies who stared at her, she had the comforting thought that her cavalier was the best-dressed and handsomest man that walked along Chepe that September day. So she answered Johnnie's question with, "Buy me whatever thou wilt; I shall say 'thanks!' But ask me not to make a choice at this time and from such a bewilderment of riches."

So the young forester shook his head to all pestering salesmen, and kept his money in his pocket for that day.

By the Royal Exchange on Cornhill Sir Walter was stopped for a moment by

the Lord Mayor, who wanted a little court news on a certain matter affecting the city. Then on he went again to the Tower. The governor, a close friend of the knight's, readily admitted the party, and showed them over the grim old fortress and palace in which, alas! the brave Raleigh was destined to spend so many lonely years. He seemed to have some foreboding of this that day, and when the governor was telling Dorothy stories of some unfortunates who had spent their last days within the frowning walls, or left them only for the block on Tower Hill, Raleigh sighed and remarked, "'Tis but a step from a sovereign's smile and the summer of the court to the gloom and winter of this place. In dreams I sometimes see myself taking the very fateful step."

This he said aside to Morgan, and the young fellow was so struck by the tone in which the words were said that they remained fixed in his memory, and he recalled them with bitter sorrow in after years when the brave knight's fears had reached their awful fulfilment.

From the Tower steps the knight took a wherry and went up the river as far as Blackfriars. Shooting the arches of London Bridge gave Dorothy one quick spasm of fear, for the craft that went ahead of them, being somewhat clumsily handled, went crash into a pier, spun round, filled and sank, and left its occupants screaming and struggling in the water. All were rescued, the boatman himself scrambling nimbly into Raleigh's boat.

"The tide is not so strong as that which races up the Severn," said Johnnie; "sure 'tis bad boating that comes to grief here."

"Not so, my master," replied the dripping boatman; "'tis the plaguy narrowness of these arches and the jutting of the pier foundations that cause the mishaps. Every fool that has handled an oar cannot shoot London Bridge."

"That may be," assented the forester; "every stream has its shoals and currents; nevertheless this Thames tide is to the Severn bore as calf is to angry bull."

Meanwhile Sir Walter was pointing out objects of interest to his fair companion. "Yonder building," he said, pointing to a hexagonal structure on the Surrey side of the river, "is the Globe Theatre. I must take ye all there some afternoon to hear some pretty comedy of sweet Will Shakespeare's. Master Morgan hath an ear for poetry, I believe; he will not snore through the love-

making scenes."

Dolly blushed. At Blackfriars steps they landed, went into the city by the Lud Gate, passed through St. Paul's and out into the Chepe again; thence to the "Swanne," where the knight took leave of them, promising to have them down to Whitehall next day if his duties at court gave him any leisure.

The shops in Chepe were closed; the apprentices ran loose with plenty of noise and racket. The sober merchants walked out to the Moorfields, with wife on arm and daughters dutifully following in modest train. Work was ended. London was taking its evening recreation.

Chapter XVIII.

THREE BROKEN MARINERS.

"Art not coming abroad, Dolly? 'Tis a most rare morning."

Morgan was leaning his length against the side-post of the door of Mistress Stowe's kitchen; his head reached to the lintel, and the smoky rafters of the low ceiling were within easy reach of his hand. Dolly stood near the fire, her face rosy with the heat, and her pretty gown hidden beneath a long apron. She glanced through the window into the sunny yard, and then at a pile of dainty cakes she had just kneaded and fashioned.

"Nay, Johnnie, I'll not come this morning. I promised our hostess to bake her some confections after our forest fashion, and I cannot leave so delicate a duty only half done. Go thou with Master Jeffreys, and bring back two lusty appetites. I will bide at home, housewife fashion, and prepare ye the wherewithal to satisfy the appetites when ye have gotten them."

"Where is thy father?"

"With Mistress Stowe in her parlour. She is showing him some rare things that her brother brought from the Spanish Main. He will have eyes for nothing

else this side of noon."

So Morgan joined Jeffreys, and the two went along Chepe westwards towards St. Paul's. At the end of the great street stood the gate known as the "Little Gate," and they went under the low archway into the cathedral precincts. Inside, the place was as busy as Chepe itself. Shops clustered under the wall, their gaudy signs swinging and creaking in the September breeze, and 'prentices cried their masters' wares and importuned passing folk to buy. The two men pushed their way through the throng towards the northern transept of the great church, and there found their path blocked again by a crowd that stood around St. Paul's cross and pulpit, all ears for the words of a popular city preacher. The cleric's discourse was more of a political oration than a sermon. He thundered against "Rome" and the "Scarlet Woman," and denounced the King of Spain as the veritable "child of the devil," and he called upon all men to be up and doing something for the destruction of the "monster." Master Jeffreys stopped to listen, and Morgan had perforce to stay with him. The reverend orator dwelt in glowing terms on the riches of the Indies, the rights of all Christians to a share therein, and the greed of Spain in refusing other nations a proper share. He played upon his audience as a skilled player upon a harp, touching each string of emotion in turn, and then striking a chord to which all strings would vibrate. For a moment he excited religious emotion, then political fervour, then greed, love of glory and adventure, then national pride and hatred of Spain, then all these together by one cunning sentence. The forester out from the west felt his heart beating rapidly, his ears warming and tingling, and his right hand fidgeting with the handle of his sword. His companion could not keep still, and hot ejaculations sprang from his lips. He was a true Devon man of that roaring time, sailor, patriot, and pirate all rolled into one.

"By my beard, Master Morgan," he gasped, "I have been feeling ill and full of strange qualms and sinkings these many days past. 'Twas an active spirit rebelling against imprisonment in an idle body. I must to sea again—this dalliance in towns and in the company of sleek shopkeepers and peacock-garbed gallants is slow death to a fellow of mettle. I must get me down to Plymouth again, and join any bold captain that hath a mind to turn his ship westward ho!"

Morgan sighed. "Bones o' me!" he exclaimed, "the parson hath stirred something within my bosom also."

The sermon—if such it could be called—being ended, the two young men

went with the crowd through the church door, and into the dim and lofty transept. And what a crowd it was to find in London's principal church! The passage through the building from north to south was a public thoroughfare. Porters, hucksters, errand boys went through with basket and handbarrow, passing across aisles and nave before the very screen that shut in choir and altar. Pedlars stood against the tall pillars, and pushed the sale of their wares. Men bought and sold and bargained as in the churchyard outside or Chepe beyond. Servants stood for hire; bravoes lurked behind the gray stone columns in dark corners, ready to take the price of blood from any hand that offered it. Broken men, needy adventurers, dissolute women—all had their regular stations in the sacred building, which was fair, market, and general rendezvous for every class and trade, legitimate or illegitimate, that had its footing in London Town.

Master Jeffreys elbowed his way into the nave and strode down the middle aisle, Morgan at his heels, full of astonishment and healthy country disgust. Any gallant who came strutting along to show his fine feathers received scant courtesy or elbow-room from the indignant forester. He thrust more than one roughly aside, without so much as a "by your leave," and his angry face, huge frame, and athletic build forced the hustled ones to keep civil tongues in their heads. Near the western door a knot of brown-faced, lean-looking men were standing, and one started forward at the sight of Jeffreys, hesitated a moment, and then put forth his hand.

"Little Timothy! or tropic suns have blinded my eyes," he cried.

Jeffreys scanned the speaker's weather-stained face.

"It's not Paignton Rob, surely?"

"It's all that's left of him, Timothy."

"Thou art shrunken."

"And lopped, brother, lopped."

"Spain?"

"Inquisition."

"Indies?"

"Vera Cruz. Shall I introduce my friends? We are nigh broken, and not too proud to accept a little charity from a Devon man. Thy heart used not to beat in a niggard's bosom."

"It has not changed lodgings, Rob. Wilt know my friend here? This is Master Morgan of Gloucestershire—a good west countrie man, to say the least. He has had his cut at King Philip, and is a friend of our gallant Raleigh."

"Then I'm open to love him," cried Paignton Rob, holding out a hand that had lost a thumb. "'Tis a poor grip that fingers can give, Master Morgan," he said apologetically. "The monks of Vera Cruz can best tell thee where little 'thumbkin' is."

Johnnie took the proffered hand. "I am proud to know one who has sailed the Western Ocean," he replied.

The mariner called up his two friends, who proved thumbless like himself.

"Nick Johnson, and Ned his brother, both of Plymouth town. Master Timothy Jeffreys, henchman to Sir Walter Raleigh, and Master Morgan, friend."

Hand-clasps went round. Jeffreys peeped into the purse that hung at his girdle.

"Here is the price of a few flagons of sack, friends. Have you a fancy for any particular tavern?"

"All taverns are alike to thirsty men," answered Rob. "Lead us where thou wilt; we'll speak our thanks under one signboard as well as another."

"What say you then to the 'Silver Lion' in Dowgate?"

"'Tis a good house."

The party left the cathedral by the western door, went south through the churchyard, and out at the gate that led riverwards. Thence they strode down a steep street towards the Dowgate quay, halting at a gabled and timbered tavern within a stone's throw of the water. Down a flight of three steps they went into the sanded parlour, and seated themselves round a corner table. The drawer came bustling up with a "What do ye drink, my masters?"

"Bring us five flagons of sack," said Timothy.

"And a crust for our teeth," whispered Paignton Rob. The ears of the serving-man were keen, "Shall it be a venison pie?" he said.

"A venison pie," broke in Morgan; "and I pay."

Chapter XIX.

PAIGNTON ROB'S STORY.

The three broken sailor men attacked the ample venison pasty with a zeal and thoroughness that betokened long abstention from work of a similar nature, and the sack trickled gratefully down parched throats. Morgan and Jeffreys drank to their better fortune, but would not touch the food, pleading that their ordinary dinner time was a full hour off, and that they were pledged to make havoc of some pastries made by a certain young gentlewoman, who would undoubtedly be much grieved if they did not eat as heartily as was their wont. So the Paignton man and his Plymouth comrades shared the pie amongst themselves, the two others looking about and noting the other occupants of the inn parlour. Some of these were known by repute to Jeffreys, and he gave Morgan information concerning them.

The pie-dish stood empty. Johnnie expressed an opinion that apples were roasting somewhere. Nick Johnson sniffed the air, and promptly agreed with him, adding that the fragrance of roasting apples awoke memories of far-off Devon. Whereupon the forester remarked that they had a like effect upon him, and that he was minded to have a dish with a little cream, if all the company would join him. There was no objector, and each man was soon busy with hot apples and cream. After this Jeffreys ordered fresh flagons of wine, and asked Paignton Rob for his story.

"Will Master Morgan care for the recital?" queried Rob.

"My ears are burning," cried Johnnie. "I seem to have strolled out of Chepe

this morning right into America. Stint not a word of thy story if thou hast any desire to please me."

"So be it, friends. I cannot but wish that some other man had the telling of it. You will remember—at least thou wilt, Timothy—how Captain John Oxenham sailed out from Plymouth with the *Hawk*, one hundred and forty ton barque, and a crew of seventy men, for the Spanish Main?"

"Ay; report says that all were slain by fever and the Indians."

"Therein doth report speak falsely. We three went with Oxenham, and we sit here to-day to tell the tale. Whether any other tongue hath told it I cannot say. There is scant hope of any more survivors. Well, to the story itself. We went out of Plymouth Sound, threescore and ten, men and boys, well armed and victualled for six months. We turned our prow westwards, prepared like good adventurers to take what fortune the seas might bring us. The voyage proved a speedy one, with a singular lack of ungentle weather: good omen, we thought, for the success of our enterprise. On the way our captain's plans, which had been somewhat uncertain at the first, took fixed shape. We passed south of the main isles of the Indies, steering for the eastern seaboard of the Isthmus of Panama. We cast along the shore for two days seeking an anchorage, and we found what we sought in a wooded creek, fringed and thronged with islets. A winding river emptied into the creek, and the banks were so thickly clothed with forest as almost to shut out the light of the sun. Dismasting our ship, we thrust her into a tiny bay o'erhung by giant trees, and neither from river nor bank could a glimpse of her be obtained. For a day we worked, making all snug aboard; then we loaded ourselves with provisions and arms, and set out to cross the isthmus to Panama itself, intending to rob the Spanish nest of the golden eggs that daily were laid therein.

"There is little to tell of the story of our march to the Pacific. We cut our way for days at a time through woods that were well-nigh impassable. We climbed mountains, threaded defiles, waded through stream and swamp. Our backs bent beneath the weight of our burdens; giant thorns tore, first our clothes, then afterwards our flesh. The sun roasted us by day; mists enwreathed and chilled us by night; a myriad insects bit us, and roaring beasts and lurking reptiles harassed our steps. Some of us were quickly down with fever, and added to the burdens of our comrades, for they bore us upon rude litters of boughs. Oxenham fought shy of the native villages, not being minded to give rumour the chance to herald our approach to the golden goal we sought.

"By good hap we came upon a stream at the foot of some hills, flowing westwards. We followed it for a while, until we felt assured that it was navigable, and also that it emptied itself into the Pacific. Then we halted, built huts for our sick, cut down timber and set about the making of a stout pinnace that would carry us on the rest of our quest. We also scoured the woods for game and fruits, and harvested the waters for fish. When our boat was builded, our sick were also upon their feet again. We had brought with us three light cannon; these we mounted on our little craft, rigged up mast and sail, and went down the swift current, westward ho! once more.

"It was no longer possible to avoid the native towns and villages, so at the first we engaged a guide who knew enough of coast Spanish to understand our wants and be our interpreter to his friends. We found that the Indians hated the Spaniards and dreaded their rapacity and cruelty. As Englishmen and foes of Spain, we always got a welcome; and Oxenham had wit enough to be kind, courteous, and generous, and so win a welcome for us for our own sakes. Our voyage down the river was a sort of triumphal progress, and we made ten thousand faithful allies. At last came the day when the river broadened to an estuary; when we saw the tide marks along the roots of the mangroves, and the salt flavour was in the air, and white-winged gulls swept screaming over our heads, scaring away the gaudy, noisy parrots that had been our feathered companions for so long. The next morning the sun shot up for us, a golden ball of cheering presage, from out the glittering bosom of the Pacific. What a shout we raised! Weeks of toil and fever were forgotten, scars and bruises healed—or were felt no longer—when the glorious heave of ocean waters lifted our keel!"

Paignton Rob paused and lifted his flagon to his lips. He put it down reflectively. "Do ye mind that morn, comrades?" he asked.

"Shall we ever forget it!" exclaimed the two Plymouth men in a breath. The company nodded to Rob, and took a friendly sip of sack in his honour. He took up again the thread of his story.

"A native that had come down the coast from the direction of Panama came to our captain with information that two treasure-ships were expected from Peru, and he offered to be our guide to the Isle of Pearls, situated about five-and-twenty leagues from Panama itself, and in the direct line of sailing to the city. We accepted his offer gladly, and the fellow led us to a snug anchorage whence we could espy our prey and make ready to sally forth and seize him.

"We lay under the island for one night and the better part of a day before our lookout in a tree-top at the edge of a steep cliff sang out, 'Sail ho! Spanish rig!' We were alert on the instant, watching the Spaniard bowling north-eastwards before a stiff breeze. At the right moment we slipped our cable, hoisted sail, and stood out to sea right in his path. No news of our presence on the isthmus had got abroad, and the foe did not suspect us until he was within range of our small guns, when we promptly sent a couple of shots splintering into his bulwarks. He was not long before he swung round and replied. But we were too low in the water to be in any danger from his bigger pieces, and in a little while we were under his lee and swarming aboard. For a few minutes there was as pretty a fight as man could wish for; then the Spaniard struck his flag and threw down his weapons.

"Well, we rifled cabins and holds; got about a hundred goodly bars of gold and a chest of pearls. The cabin gave us an excellent supply of wine and some curious golden images of native workmanship. We helped ourselves also to some better clothing, then let the Spaniard go his way.

"For two more days we hung about the island, then seized a ship with a cargo, mostly of silver bars. Our pinnace was now so heavily laden that we durst not venture to put anything more aboard her. We were rich enough already, and, knowing that the authorities at Panama would soon hear of our exploits, we turned south to our river again, and set out on our journey back to our hidden ship and the Atlantic.

"So far we had lost but two men, and one of these had died from fever. Half a score of us, maybe, had received wounds. The Spanish dogs will not fight much on a ship's deck, and the silver galleon offered us hardly any resistance. 'Tis easy work enough, this gathering of Spanish gold in the Indies. Do I speak within the strict bounds of truth, comrades?"

"True as a Bible verse, Rob," said Nick Johnson; and brother Ned assented with a seaman's "Ay! ay!"

Rob took advantage of the pause to take another peep into his flagon, and Johnnie asked him if he could see bottom.

"Depth enough to float my barque a little longer," replied Rob.

"We did not waste much time feasting or merrymaking with our Indian allies;

we just stayed long enough for civility and the procuring of a couple of canoes and rowers to ease the burden in our pinnace. Then we set off up-stream. An under-chief came with us, and he was to obtain carriers for our booty and provisions at the last village before we should be forced to quit the river and take to the forests and mountains. But we did not get along so quickly as we purposed at the first. News of our victories over the detested Dons had spread like a fire through the isthmus. Chiefs came to palaver, offer gifts, and sue for our protection. The whole land wanted to shelter beneath the banner of St. George, and our eastward voyage was a sort of triumphal procession. This was all very pleasant, but 'twas dallying with danger. The Spaniards were acquainted with our doings—the captains of the rifled ships would tell them so much; and some of us argued that if every petty Indian chief knew exactly where to meet us, then assuredly the Dons must be aware of our route also. However, 'tis hard to make victors cautious. We had a hearty contempt for the Spaniards in Panama, and did not give them credit for pluck enough to follow us. So we journeyed along in a fool's paradise, surrounded by admiring Indians, and so laden with booty and presents that we could only move at a snail's pace.

"One day a native runner came to us from a friendly village with the news that a force of a hundred Spaniards, well armed, was in pursuit. The Indians were eager for us to stay and meet the Dons, promising us help if we would do so. Oxenham decided he had done enough for glory just then, and thought it wiser to get back to his ship and sail for home; our spoil was too precious to be risked, and was a tempting bait to any foe. We set out at once. Coming to a place where two streams entered the main river, we took the smallest waterway, hoping thus to baffle pursuit, for our real path lay along the main stream. Our ruse would have succeeded but for a trivial oversight. The Dons came to the parting of the ways, and were nonplussed as to our route. They had decided to follow the main stream, and were seated in their canoes ready to resume the pursuit, when a bunch of plucked feathers came down the smallest stream. Within ten minutes other feathers came floating along, and some were bloodstained. They rightly guessed that these were evidence that we had prepared food somewhere higher up. Boats were forsaken, and a march through the forest commenced. That very night they surprised us. We fought well, and our Indian friends proved no cowards. Fifty of us, fairly well laden with gold, got away, and after a toilsome march reached the place where our ship had been hidden—only to find it gone!

"We hunted the creek on both sides, and found unmistakable signs that the

Dons had found our vessel and confiscated it. Why they did not lie in ambush for us we could not imagine. Maybe they thought us effectually trapped, and likely to be an easy prey to fever, or to their attack after fever had had its way with us. For a while we were in despair; then we remembered old England, and what she expects of her sons. We buried our gold, felled trees, and began to build canoes. But the side of the creek at night was a death-trap. Heavy foetid mists wreathed up from the waters, poisoning the air; noxious insects hummed about our couches, and loathly reptiles crawled out of the mud and chilled our hearts with their horrible croakings. One by one we sickened; in ones, twos, threes we died. Then the cunning Dons came in force. They were five to our one, and we trembling with fever. We fought as well as we could. Many fell fighting; others, too weak to stand to deliver a stout blow, were taken as prisoners: we three were amongst these. Our captors cured us of the fever, then handed us over to the priests at Vera Cruz. A year we spent in prison. We have been on the rack; the thumbscrews bereft us of thumbs, for they crushed them so badly that we were fain to have them off, fearing the arm might mortify. The villains cropped us of one ear, so that they might track us if we chanced to escape. By the mercy of God we did escape, and, despite the mark set upon us, avoided recapture and found our way back to Plymouth. What perils we passed through in swamp and forest, by river and sea, ere we found an English ship I cannot now set forth. Let it suffice that we are here, alive and eager for further opportunities on the isthmus."

"How do you propose to get there?" asked Jeffreys.

"We would see thy master, Sir Walter, and get him to fit a ship. There is gold enough buried by the creek banks to repay him or any other man."

Jeffreys shook his head. "Sir Walter's eyes are turned farther south. He would find 'El Dorado.'"

Chapter XX.

ROB DINES AT "YE SWANNE."

Morgan had a host of questions to ask Paignton Rob, and he wont back to "Ye Swanne" in Wood Street, off Chepe, his head buzzing with many ideas. So occupied was he with his own thoughts that he replied but absently to Captain Dawe's remarks; and he quite forgot to offer Dolly any compliments over her pastries. The young lady was naturally indignant with a burly trencherman who devoured a round dozen of assorted confections that were put on his platter without discovering that they possessed any flavour whatsoever.

"La! Master Morgan!" she cried. "If I did not know that such a thing was impossible with such as thou art, I should declare thou hadst fallen in love."

The tone was sharp, and a trifle spiteful, so Johnnie's wits gathered themselves into marching order.

"So I have, Dolly," he answered. "I am enamoured of—"

"Whom?"

"A friend of Master Jeffreys."

The girl's cheeks flushed. "Thou art bold to say such a thing to me."

"I imbibed courage with a flagon of sack this morning."

"It hath got to thy head."

"And my heart, Dolly; I am afire, heart and head. I see visions, and pulse with great hopes."

"I trust the wench will prove kind, and not grow plain of face on a closer acquaintance."

"For that fair wish, a thousand thanks, dear Dolly."

"Mistress Dawe, if it please you, Master Morgan." Dorothy bobbed a scornful curtsy, and left the parlour.

"What's amiss with you two?" asked Captain Dawe. "Ye were billing and cooing like two pigeons over breakfast this morning."

"And shall be doing so again over supper," said Johnnie.

"What's this nonsense about a wench who is a friend to Master Jeffreys?"

"There is no wench. I am enamoured of a fellow with a visage like brown leather, and who hath but one thumb and one ear."

"Thou art talking in riddles."

"Master Jeffreys shall make them clear; he hath a better gift of words than I."

So the Devon man retold the story of John Oxenham's voyage; and he added many strange things that lie had heard from other Plymouth men who had gone to the Indies, and whom he had met in Raleigh's company. He himself had gone westwards to Virginia, and other parts of the American mainland, and could relate wonders from his own experiences. He talked for full two hours, and both Mrs. Stowe and Dorothy stole in to listen.

The next day Paignton Rob and his two stranded comrades found themselves seated at Mistress Stowe's table to dinner. Morgan and the captain hung about the aisles of St. Paul's for more than an hour, waiting in the hope that the sailors would appear. Jeffreys went down to Whitehall, found them in the neighbourhood of Raleigh's lodgings, and brought them into the city.

The three derelict mariners were not slow to divine one reason for the pressing invitation that had brought them hot-foot from Whitehall to Wood Street. Rob's story of the fabled Spanish Main had opened Mistress Stowe's door to such dilapidated guests; it would have opened hundreds of other English doors to the maimed adventurers. The whole country was smitten with the fever of travel, and possessed with the lust for wealth and conquest. Men and women believed strange things of the wonderful western world, and they listened eagerly and without question to things their great-grandchildren would scoff at.

A travelled sailor can fit himself into any company. Paignton Rob adjusted himself with the greatest nicety into his proper position that day. He ate and drank to repletion, praising every dish without stint, and paying his hostess such daring compliments that her round face was a very sunset of blushes.

Nick and Ned Johnson played their accustomed part of chorus, and just said "ay, ay" at the proper time and place. And Rob did not keep his audience too

long waiting for his stories. He described the tropical seas—their storms and calms, their fish that flew, and the fearsome monsters that gambolled along their surface. He took his hearers into the gloomy forests, with their myriad forms of life, their gaudy birds and gorgeous insects, their lurking beasts and dense-packed horrors. Weird cries and terrifying howls rang out in imaginative sounds. And what horrific beings stalked in the dim alleys betwixt the giant trees, or peeped forth at the intrepid traveller from cave and den! One-horned beasts with fiery hoofs; dragons that had wings of brass, and vomited flames from cavernous throats; huge birds, enormous reptiles, flew or crawled in their appointed places. Two-headed men wielded clubs of stone; men with no heads at all, but one great eye in the centre of their breasts, glared malevolently from the pits wherein they had their habitation. The little company in the tavern parlour shivered with affright, and cast uneasy glances at the doorway. Then—wonderful Rob!—a sinewy, thumbless hand swept the air like an enchanter's wand, and lo! the scene was changed. Gloom and horror fled, the forest vanished, the malodorous swamp gave place to smiling meadow. The hills frowned no longer, but laughed with fertility and sparkled with a thousand fairy rills and cascades. Fair cities encircled their bases, and golden temples glittered in the ardent, tropical sunshine. Brown-skinned, gentle people flitted gracefully along the streets and through the squares. Music, barbaric but melodious, hummed through the fragrant air. Here was the paradise of dreams—bright colours, sweet sounds, fragrant odours, gentle beings, fair peace, and jocund plenty! Rob was a poet, and his audience panted with parting lips as he spread the scene before them.

Then he brought them nearer. See yonder roof?—plates of beaten gold! Yonder mule hath harness of exquisitely chased silver! Here comes a noble chief and his favourite wife, with a retinue of slaves. The soles of his sandals are of gold, the straps are studded with gems; pearls are sewn in hundreds in his bright-hued robes! Yet is he completely eclipsed by the splendour of his spouse. She is sprinkled, hair and clothing, with the precious yellow dust. The breeze blows it from her hair; she shakes it with a careless laugh from her silken garments; the slaves walk behind on a gold-strewn pathway. They value it no more than the beggar values the dust that blows along the Chepe in London on a July day. Ah! a gloriously generous headpiece hath Paignton Rob. Why stint the tale of glittering grains? In the land of "El Dorado" the sands of the rivers can be coined into minted money. Would mine hostess—who has so lavishly fed three poor sailor-men—like to go to a banquet in the palace of "El Dorado"? Nothing simpler!—'tis done with a wave of Rob's brown hand. See! the table is gold; the platters are the same. The pillars of sweet cedar that support the lofty roof are

richer by far than those of Solomon's temple. And the "gilded one" smiles at his queen, and lifts a cup of rosy wine to his lips. Do the company notice that miracle of dazzling light he holds in his delicate brown hand? 'Tis cut from one precious stone. It is like a living fire, and the red wine glows warmly through it.

Such the land of "El Dorado"—the golden realm!—the home of an everlasting summer! Rob pauses dramatically; he comes to a full stop. How mean is the parlour of the comfortable Wood Street tavern! How paltry its pewter pots and clumsy flagons! How dull its smoky beams and walls!

"Ah! Ah!"—longing sighs echo and re-echo. Then come questions, timidly put at first, for no man would dare to throw suspicion on the seaman's stories. But—but who has seen any of these things?

Who? Why, Rob knows men, who know other men, who have heard from other men, who actually listened to dying Spaniards or faithful natives recounting how they themselves had seen these sights. Rob himself had gazed upon a sack of gold dust brought by a Jesuit missionary from "El Dorado's" kingdom. The monk had shovelled it with his own bare hands from the bed of a shallow lake. Nick Johnson, with a nervous and apologetic cough, announced that he had seen a bag of pearls brought from that same favoured land; and brother Ned, whose memory also got some stimulus from Rob's stories, related how lie met a Spanish prisoner in a Dutch town, who told him that the pebbles in "El Dorado's" land were all pearls or jewels, sometimes one, sometimes the other—just according to the haphazard luck of the thing. Then honest Rob took some more sack, and found that he distinctly remembered meeting a Bideford man on Plymouth Hoe who had sailed with a Bristol captain whose twin brother had shot a no-headed, breast-eyed monster, and had immediately afterwards been stunned by the stone club of a two-headed gentleman of those same parts. 'Twas an exciting adventure altogether, and Rob proceeded to remember the details and relate them. As for the forests, the swamps, the lurking reptiles and ravenous beasts, the huge crabs, venomous snakes, and the fevered ghosts and ghouls that wreathed up after sunset from the pools and rivers—why! Rob had seen all those things for himself. He had also handled bars of gold and lumps of silver, and let pearls run through his fingers like beads. Captain Dawe, Master Morgan, and the ladies might be assured that they had heard but a tithe of the wonders and horrors that might be told them. Ah! that wonderful New World! Brave Rob shook the head that was bereft of an ear. He had talked to them for three hours, but he had no gift of speech, and had been unable to give them any real idea of

the glamour and mystery that lay beneath the setting sun.

Nevertheless, he had set each heart and brain pulsing and throbbing with wild dreams. The world was changing for Johnnie Morgan. The admiral and Raleigh had opened his eyes in the glades of the forest, and taught him to look beyond its treetops. Master Jeffreys had extended his view, and all men and all things in London Town seemed to probe deeper into his mind, and find new emotions and desires, and stir them into active life. The grim old Forest of Dean was dwarfing to a mere coppice; the rushing Severn was becoming an insignificant brook. The forester's heart was expanding; his eyes were opening; his arms were stretching forth to grasp that which was finite, yet infinite. He dreamed strange dreams; his eyes started open to behold wondrous visions. The fever of the time was getting into his blood. Vague, half-understood impulses moved him hither and thither. He groped, and touched nothing. He cried out, "What do I want?"

A woman answered the question the very next day.

Chapter XXI.

MORGAN GOES TO WHITEHALL.

In the early forenoon of the next day a man in the livery of Sir Walter came to "Ye Swanne" and asked for Master Morgan. He brought a command that the forester was to repair instantly to Whitehall, as the Queen had intimated that she would see him in the afternoon. The summons threw Johnnie into a small fever of nervous apprehension, and he wished heartily that he had never left his snug homestead at Blakeney. His fingers turned into thumbs, and Dorothy busied herself in fastening points and laces, adjusting his ruff, and setting his cap at the proper angle. Captain Dawe found that sword and belt required his critical attention, and Master Jeffreys started a most elaborate dissertation on court etiquette in "the most polite court in Europe." Johnnie's head buzzed, his mind wandered in a maze; and when at last he stepped out into the sunshine of the streets, he confessed to Mistress Stowe that he felt "like a thief going to be hanged." Captain Dawe had a desire to see the royal palace and its precincts, Jeffreys was wanted at Raleigh's lodgings, so all four gentlemen went

westwards.

Along Chepe, through St. Paul's Churchyard, down the hill to the Lud Gate lay their way. Then they crossed the Fleet River and stepped out into Fleet Street. On their left was the palace of Bridewell, stretching down to the green margin of the Thames; on their right the fields went northwards to the villages of Bloomsbury, Clerkenwell, and Islington. The street was thick with dust and crowded with pedestrians and horsemen. Staid burghers walked soberly along, fops strutted, bullies swaggered, gentlefolks went in fitting dignity, and beggars whined for alms at the corners of the narrow lanes that, between the houses, led down to the river. Law students from the Temple were to be met with, chaffering with the market wenches for nuts and apples and bunches of flowers.

Master Jeffreys took charge of Morgan, and fed him full with information. "A wonderful thoroughfare, good sir!" he cried; "its dust hath been pressed by the feet of notable folk for many centuries, and will take the footprints of the great ones for many centuries to come. 'Tis the highway between our two ancient cities of London and Westminster. We will keep to the south side, for it is the more famous, and contains the houses of many of our nobles. The north side is left for the shopkeepers and smaller gentry. We have just passed the royal palace of Bridewell, and from here every foot of our way will have something to interest the curious and inquiring mind."

Johnnie stared down at the gray old palace, and looked questioningly at the ruins that lay next to it on the east.

"All that's left of the monastery of the Whitefriars," said Jeffreys. "The remains of monkish buildings cumber the ground outside of London walls as well as within. Some say 'twas a wicked thing to pull down so many fair edifices; others declare they were no better than plague-spots and heretical hovels on the fair face of a Protestant country, and that we are well rid of them."

"I have noticed," said Morgan, "that royal favourites from King Harry's time onwards have done most of the pulling down. The common folk appear to have had little voice in the matter, and not a finger in the lifting of the plunder."

"Quite so! quite so! Now let us step into the roadway. 'Tis dusty enough, and not innocent of some ugly holes, but 'tis safer for a little while. See those hangdog-looking fellows slouching before us? Ah! I need not tell thee what they

are. Step out; let's see the sport."

There was a wild *mêlée* about a hundred yards ahead. A fellow had made a cut with his dagger at a lady's purse, and had been promptly knocked down by her cavalier. At the sound of the would-be robber's cry a dozen other rascals had rushed to his aid, and from the narrow lanes and alleys a horde of ruffians—male and female—had been vomited. They set upon the lady and her companion with cudgels and knives, and the gentleman was already lying in the dust. Peace-loving pedestrians had rushed to their aid, and a group of law students bore down into the fray in gallant style. Master Jeffreys whipped out his blade and ran, and Morgan went with him stride for stride. But the mob of ruffians disappeared as quickly as it had come forth; the cutpurse had been rescued, and the plunder he desired snatched by a slatternly wench.

Morgan uttered a hunting cry, and was dashing down a dim passage between two houses when Jeffreys jerked him back. "Not a foot farther if thou dost value thy life!"

Johnnie stopped, and saw in astonishment that no man was attempting pursuit.

"Are they to escape red-handed?" he cried.

His companion shrugged his shoulders. "He'd be an over-bold man who'd venture into the alleys and courts of Alsatia with less than fifty good swords at his back. The hangman would be busy for a month if all who merited his rope were dragged out of yonder dens. But we must be going; the captain is almost out of sight, and thou hast matters on hand that are of greater moment than the catching of a thief."

Walking on, the two came abreast of the Temple, and lawyers, scriveners, clerks, and students dotted the roadway.

"A sweetly built place is the Temple," commented Jeffreys: "cool alleys shaded with trees, spacious courts, goodly halls and chapels; fair gardens sloping sunnily and warmly to the south and the river. Ah! there is no fairer site on earth for a fine dwelling than on this bank of Father Thames. Thou wilt see by the great houses that we shall pass how many men are of my opinion."

Morgan came to Temple Bar, and saw, with a shudder, a row of mouldering

heads atop of it. He passed beneath the archway and put foot in the famous Strand. Immediately before him the Maypole stretched skyward, its top still ornamented with a few fluttering rags of weather-bleached ribbon, mementoes of the festivities that had ushered in the fast-fading summer. On his left, with its front to the river, was a great house with its courts and gardens, and Master Jeffreys whispered,—

"The town house of my Lord Essex, the Queen's favourite and the great rival of the gallant knight we both love."

Morgan stood and gazed at the somewhat ugly pile with the greatest interest.

As he moved on a cleanly lad came across the road, with a shining pannikin in either hand, and asked politely whether "their worships" would care to quench their thirst in water drawn from the well of St. Clement or from Holy Well that was hard by.

"Which is the more precious liquid?" asked Morgan.

The lad quickly replied that he had no opinion, and that learned men and excellent divines could come to no agreement over the matter. His worship might drink of both and judge for himself; the charge was but a farthing.

"Cheaper than Mistress Stowe's sack, at any rate, if not so palatable," said Johnnie. He gave the lad a farthing and took the Holy Well pannikin, whilst his companion drained that which owned its virtues to the sanctity of St. Clement, whose church fronted them across the way. As neither tasted of both, they had, like the water-seller, no opinion as to the merits of the rival wells.

They walked on past Somerset House.

"A stately pile," said Morgan.

"Fairer even than Whitehall," replied Jeffreys. '"Twas built by an arch-robber, but the Queen favours it and dwells in it at times. 'Tis the goodliest palace along the Strand."

The Savoy, already centuries old and crumbling to decay, was passed; and then, by other noble edifices, the wayfarers went to the village of Charing.

They turned down by Queen Eleanor's Cross into the street leading to Whitehall itself. They passed through the Holbein Gate, down King's Street; and close under the shadow of the hoary abbey of St. Peter they halted at Raleigh's lodgings. Captain Dawe and his guide were resting in the cool porch and awaiting them.

Chapter XXII.

THE QUEEN.

John Morgan, yeoman and forester, rose from his knee, and stood, with bowed head and fumbling fingers, abashed in a most august presence. He plucked nervously at his cap, and dared not raise his face to confront the calm countenance of his sovereign. Elizabeth, for her part, scanned him most critically from top to toe. She noted the cut of his clothes, the stiffness of his ruff, the size of the buckles on his shoon; from these to the colour of his hair and the healthy tan of his skin, nothing escaped her. She was rapidly measuring him, height and girth, with the proportions of her handsome Devon knight who had led the shy young stalwart in.

"So this is the gallant young fellow who bled in thy service?" she said to Raleigh.

"And in the service of your Majesty," added the knight. "He saved the life of your humblest servant, but he also fought and bled in defence of your Majesty's honour and the integrity of your dominions."

Elizabeth looked again at the bent head. "Dost know the colour of mine eyes, Master Morgan?" she asked sharply.

"The colour of heaven, your Majesty," gasped Johnnie.

The Queen laughed. "I thought thou hadst not looked at them. 'Tis easy to see that thou hast kept company with a certain Walter Raleigh; thou canst assume modesty and yet flatter as glibly as he."

"Your Majesty!" cried Raleigh.

"Hath excellent eyesight, thank God!" added Elizabeth. "I wish I had found Master Morgan a simpler gentleman. I am sick of pretty speeches, and thought to find a plain, unspoiled Englishman who would speak naught but truth. Wilt let me see what colour thine eyes are, Master Morgan? I have noted every hair on the top of thy head."

Johnnie raised a flushed face to the pale, cool countenance of his sovereign.

"Dost not find mine eyes *green*?" she asked, and leaned a little forward in her chair.

"There is a glint of the verdure of England in them, your Majesty, and the sheen of the blue of her skies and her seas."

"And thou dost consider them, therefore, to be perfect for England's Queen?"

"God made your Majesty, and we daily thank Him for His abounding goodness and wisdom."

A faint blush stole into Elizabeth's cheeks, and the blue-green eyes danced. "Thou dost see merrie England mirrored in these pale orbs?"

"The country lives in your Majesty's heart, and the heart looks out through the eyes."

Elizabeth sat back. She turned to Raleigh.

"They breed poets in the shadow of Dean's oaks," she said.

"When first I met Master Morgan he was writing verses in the woodlands."

"And to whom?"

"A pretty maiden."

"Ah! What colour are her eyes, bold forester?"

"Blue, an't please your Majesty."

"It doth not please me at all. I thought thy conceit about the 'green and blue' of England very pretty and spontaneous for me. Now I perceive 'tis but an old compliment thou hast paid a thousand times before to some woodland wench."

"Your Majesty mistakes. The thought never came to my mind before I uttered it just now. I know not what made me think it then, unless 'twas your Majesty's presence inspired me. I am a dull fellow, and no poet, as Mistress Dawe often tells me."

"Hast never told her that her eyes are blue?"

"I have, your Majesty."

"And that she is the fairest maid on earth?"

"I have said that also, and 'tis God's truth that I think her to be so."

"Humph!"

The exclamation was a little unroyal. Raleigh, who had stood in almost mute astonishment at Morgan's strange readiness of tongue and aptness of expression, now began to fear that the blunt yeoman was going to undo all his previous good work. Elizabeth Tudor was not accustomed to hear that some other "maid" was the fairest on earth.

"When dost thou hope to wed this dainty nymph?"

"When the maid wills it, your Majesty."

"Hath she no father, then, to command her?"

"She hath; but he would not lay an order upon her, neither would I have him do so. Maidens will have their whims. I care not, so mine be constant."

"Thou dost find her wayward then?"

"All pretty things are fashioned so."

"Am I wayward, thinkest thou?"

"Your Majesty would be very woman but that you are also Queen."

"But I am a woman when my crown is off."

Johnnie shook his head. "God hath given your Majesty special graces, and such strength that the woman in you must obey the sovereign."

Elizabeth sighed. "Thou art right," she said. "Daily have I to beat the woman in me down, down. 'Tis hard to do it, for the woman will cry out for what is hers by nature. Canst thou not perceive, Master Morgan, that the struggle is bitter at times? Yet the woman in me must succumb; for, did she have her way, England, my England, would suffer."

"Therefore did God give the Queen strength," murmured Johnnie.

Elizabeth arose. "I will see thee again," she said. "Thou hast some homely mother wisdom, and a truthful tongue. It cheers a Queen's heart to learn that, far from courts and crowds, she hath valiant and loyal subjects like to thee. But I must ask thee to consider whether thou canst not serve us to more advantage than offers on a simple farm. Thou hast given a little brave blood for England. The world is wide, and our foes are many. Doth not thy spirit cry out for wings at times?"

"It hath in these last few days, your Majesty."

"Yes?"

"I have been talking with some sailor-men from the Spanish Main, and the sea sings in mine ears, sleeping and waking."

"Then obey the call."

"I will."

"God prosper you!"

"And bring your Majesty happiness and length of days."

Chapter XXIII.

JOHNNIE SEES MANY SIGHTS.

The Queen left the audience chamber in company with her maids-of-honour, and Raleigh held the curtains over the doorway aside for them to pass through. He came back to where Morgan was standing, and looked him quizzingly up and down.

"Upon my faith as a knight! thou, John Morgan, art the biggest packet of surprises I have yet brought within the gray walls of Whitehall Palace. They do say that the air of this place is peculiarly suitable for the breathing of west-country men. We thrive in it amazingly, to the chagrin of better men born elsewhere. But thou hast developed from close bud to full-blown flower in a single afternoon. Who cut the strings of thy tongue, and took the bands from thy wits? Thou didst speak like a ten years courtier at the least. I will confess that I hearkened to thee dumb with sheer amazement."

Johnnie rubbed his chin ruefully.

"I am sore afraid that my tongue hath undone me; yet, for the life of me, I could put no bridle upon it when once her Majesty had me by the eyes. She willed the words out of me. Bones o' me! I pray I may never have to face her with a secret locked in my bosom, and she suspicious that I kept something hidden. 'Twould out, like murder. But her spirit compelled mine as that of a strong man compelling a weaker."

"There hast thou solved the royal riddle of England's governance. We are swayed by the brain of a man behind the mask of woman's face. To the woman that we behold we pay that chivalrous deference and loving devotion that her sex and her station claim from true men; but when we would treat her like a woman, with womanly weaknesses, then peeps the man from behind the mask, and we kneel to one stronger than ourselves. The 'woman' that appeals to us, and cries for our love, is at times capricious as an April day. But the 'man' is ever firm and dominating, and with 'him' no one of us dares to trifle. Thy fortunate star shone o'er thee to-day. Few men have made so excellent a first impression on England's maiden Queen. But be not froward because of a first success, nor hope too much from a royal smile. The east wind can blow bitingly, even on a sunny day. Come with me now to the royal buffet; 'tis treason to quit this roof after a first visit

without drinking a bumper to the sovereign's health. Her Majesty is a very country housewife in the matter of cakes and ale and clean sheets in the guest chamber."

Morgan quitted the audience chamber on Raleigh's arm, threaded numerous corridors, sumptuously curtained and carpeted, and came at last to a spacious room where, on a huge sideboard of carven oak, constant provision was maintained for bodily refreshment. Servants in royal livery stood about, and several gentlemen of the household, who had just been relieved from duty, or come in from running some royal errand, stood sipping a cup of wine. All saluted Raleigh courteously, and bowed ceremoniously to his companion. Johnnie returned the bow, feeling considerably less at ease than he had done in his sovereign's presence. The critical stare of so many resplendent gallants unnerved him, and he was heartily glad to quit the chamber and get out into the air of the courtyard. Raleigh escorted him to the palace gate, where Jeffreys awaited him. Captain Dawe had gone to look in at the bowling green, where some of the royal officers were playing bowls. Him they found; then, not caring for the walk back down Strand and Fleet Street, they went to Whitehall Stairs within the palace precincts, hailed a wherry, and went down on the tide to the stairs at Blackfriars. The sun was setting when they landed, and columns of smoke rising from a score of points showed that the city watchmen were lighting the evening purifying fires at street corners and in the open spaces. The air on the river had been cool and pleasant enough, but it was stifling in the narrow lanes leading up from the stream to the hill of St. Paul's. The pungent smoke from the newly-kindled wood piles came quite refreshingly to the nostrils.

"We have had a most fortunate year in London," said Master Jeffreys. "No case of plague, and very few of fever. The aldermen of the wards were for stopping these fires a week ago, but the bishop resolved to keep them going within his boundaries until October set in. 'Tis wonderful how the smoke and flames do take the noisome vapour from the air. If we could but get some good rains now to wash out the gutters and conduits, the city would be cleansed and sweetened for the winter."

"For my part," answered the forester, "I should always breathe but chokingly in these streets."

"Oh, the air is wholesome enough," said Jeffreys "and stout fellows thrive on it. Just give an eye to yonder band of 'prentice lads. I would not wish to see

better limbs, and I'll warrant that no forest-bred lad can give harder thwacks with oaken cudgel than can these retailers of ribbons and fal-lals."

"The rogues are hearty enough," assented Johnnie, "and their lungs are like bellows of leather. London is a fine place, and the air, doubtless, sweet enough to those who have not the lingering fragrance of the bracken in their nostrils. The scent of the woods or the salt of the sea for me."

"And the salt of the sea is the sweeter. Ah!" Master Jeffreys sniffed longingly.

Chepe was pretty full of leisurely pedestrians; the doorways of the taverns were crowded; jugglers balanced themselves in the dusty gutter, and merry maidens tripped it neatly in the inn courtyards to the sound of pipe and tabor. The merchants' parlours over their shops were often the scene of a friendly or family gathering, and more than one sweetly-sung madrigal floated harmoniously out on the evening air. Elizabethan London was a musical city, and part-singing was cultivated beneath the rooftree of every well-to-do burgher. The fresh voices of the young girls and the mellower notes of journeyman or apprentice mingled tunefully together. The great city was resting from the labours of the day, and soothing its spirit to enjoy the deeper rest and tranquillity of the night. There was a little horseplay amongst the lads gathered round the tumblers and tavern doors, but it hardly disturbed the calm peacefulness of the scene. The side streets were practically deserted, Chepe and St. Paul's Churchyard being the fashionable promenades. Not a solitary figure blotted the narrow vista of Wood Street when the three friends turned their wearied legs into it. They found "Ye Swanne" in charge of the tapster and the serving-wench, and with Paignton Rob for its solitary guest. He hailed his hosts of the previous day with delight, and hastened to inform them that Dame Fortune was "smiling upon him with both eyes." Whilst lounging in the aisles of St. Paul's he had been recognized by a Dartmouth skipper under whom he had once crossed the Atlantic on a piratical expedition against Spain. The venture had failed, and the golden visions dangled before Rob's eyes had vanished. But the Dartmouth captain had tried again, and had been eminently successful, bringing home a shipload of rich booty. Hearing Rob's story of Oxenham's expedition, and seeing for himself the marks of Spanish cruelty on the seaman's body, the generous skipper had made Rob a present of ten crowns, and had also given the Johnsons —whom he had never seen before—a couple of crowns apiece, and offered all three a berth aboard his ship, which was leaving for Dartmouth on the next morning's tide. The Johnsons had accepted, but Rob had declined, being resolved to see Raleigh and some other gentlemen adventurers concerning his plans for a recovery of Oxenham's buried treasure.

"And now," added the sailor, "I owe ye a debt of hospitality, and am come hither to pay it. The tapster hath my orders, and ye will not refuse to take bite and sup with me this night."

Not one of the company said "Nay," for Rob was evidently bent upon playing the host. But Captain Dawe asked where his daughter and Mistress Stowe had hidden themselves, and got for answer the tidings that they had gone out into the Moorfields to take the air and see an archery contest, the heat in the city having been well-nigh intolerable that afternoon.

The twilight was growing faint, the narrow street was in semi-darkness. Johnnie inquired which way the ladies would return, and getting the direction started out to meet them and give them escort. He had not gone far before he saw two ladies hurrying along, huddled rather closely together, and a couple of city gallants bowing and smirking beside them in the roadway. The young fellow's face flushed; for, even in the growing darkness, he recognized one slight, graceful figure as that of Dorothy. He hastened forward, and soon got near enough to distinguish the faces of the four, and to perceive that the ladies were being annoyed by the unwelcome attentions of the two fops, who, attracted doubtless by Dolly's beauty and apparent rusticity, were endeavouring to force acquaintance upon the buxom hostess of the "Swanne." Johnnie seized both the situation and the offenders in a moment. Grasping the youths by the nape of the neck, he cracked their curled heads together until they yelled with pain. Then he forced their noses down to their knees.

"Bow low, ye rascals," he cried. "Lower still; ye are not doing sufficient homage to beauty and innocence yet."

The two collapsed, toppled forward, and lay prone on their stomachs in the thick, foul dust.

"Kiss the ground they walk on," pursued the relentless Johnnie; "'tis what ye mouthing apes profess to do. Kiss it—let me hear ye," and he held them in his grip until two resounding smacks rewarded his efforts. "Now," he said, "maybe ye will not annoy womenfolk again for an evening or two. I'll lout the heads of both of you together if I see your smirking faces in this street any more."

The forester straightened himself, offered an arm to each of the ladies, and led them home.

Lights shone from the parlour window of "Ye Swanne" that night long after they were douted in the other houses of Wood Street. Johnnie had to recount all the incidents of his visit to the court; and Dorothy and the hostess asked him a hundred questions about the Queen, many of them concerning her dress and her jewels, and quite beyond his powers of answering. He said nothing about the promise given to his sovereign in a moment of loyal enthusiasm, a promise that pledged him to voyage and adventure on the Spanish Main.

"Time enough for that," he said to himself. "I'll talk at greater length to Bob to-morrow; and as no ships will be sailing westward ho! until the spring comes again, I may as well leave talking for a later day, and make my plans now in silence."

The party from the forest spent another week in London, and during that time Johnnie went twice to Whitehall, on the second occasion taking Dorothy with him. The Queen was very gracious to her pretty subject from the west, and praised her beauty openly. Yet, in spite of the royal condescension, Dolly felt terribly afraid, and owned to Raleigh that she was very glad to get outside the palace doors again.

On another day the knight took them to the play on the other side of the river, where they saw a comedy of Ben Jonson's. After the play the captain went to see the bear-baiting in the bear-pit hard by, but the two young people preferred a trip on the river as far as Chelsea. This was a very busy and momentous day, for in the evening Master Jeffreys took Morgan down to the "Mermaid Tavern" between Wood Street and Milk Street, where Raleigh was presiding over a gathering of the "Mermaid Club," and there the young countryman found himself in a very nest of poets—Shakespeare, Jonson, Marlowe, Sidney, and Raleigh himself. In after years he hardly knew which to call the most notable moment in his life—the one when he kissed his Queen's hand, or the one when he drank a cup of sack with the greatest wits and geniuses of his age.

When the Severn-side folks went westwards again, Paignton Rob accompanied them; for Johnnie had invited the mariner to make his home with him during the winter, purposing in the spring to go with him on a first voyage to the New World.

Chapter XXIV.

TWO CHANCE WAYFARERS.

It was the feast of St. Thomas, the sky gray blue, with a pale, cold-looking sun, the Queen's highway frozen into an iron hardness, and the pools and ditches frost-bound. The wind had shaken the hoar from the trees and hedges, and the holly-berries stood out in brilliant bunches against the dark green of the encircling leaves. Along the road between Bristol and Gloucester, and, but for the wintry haze that narrowed the horizon, within sight of the latter city, trudged a burly fellow, staff in hand and a sea song on his lips. His thick shoon awoke echoes from hedge to hedge, and his iron-shod staff rang in unison. Hosen of warm, gray homespun covered his legs, and he had a doublet of the same goodly stuff; a cap, trimmed with otter-skin, was pulled down tightly over his ears, and an ample cloak of somewhat gaudy blue flapped in the keen wind; rime, and tiny beads of frozen vapour, hung like pearls in his black beard. He rolled in his walk as a sailor should, and sometimes he whistled the air of his song by way of change from the singing of the words.

"Then ho! for the Spanish Main,
And ha! for the Spanish gold;
King Philip's ships are riding deep
With the weight of wealth untold.
They're prey for the saucy lads
Who dance on the Plymouth Hoe;
They'll all sail home thro' the fleecy foam,
With a rich galleon in tow-tow-tow,
With a rich galleon in tow!"

The mariner swung his staff in rhythm with the swing of his chorus, and his hearty voice pealed out like a trumpet on the sharp air.

"A spirited song well sung!" cried a voice in the sailor's rear.

He turned sharply around, and found a thin, wiry fellow close at his heels. "*Madre de Dios!*" he cried, with a Spanish oath. "Where didst thou spring from? I heard no steps behind me."

"Hardly possible, friend, that thou shouldst hear a little fellow like me against thy song, staff, and heavier footfalls. I fell in thy wake out of the lane at Quedgely, and have been trying to come up with thee for the sake of thy jolly company."

"Is yonder parcel of huts Quedgely?"

"Ay. Thou art a stranger; Devon, if thy speech is to be trusted."

"Devon is my bonny country, lad—Devon every inch of me. Dost know Devon?"

"But little. 'Tis a brave shire, and breeds brave sons. Could I be born again, I'd pray to see the sun first from a Devon cradle."

"Thy hand, brother. If thou wert less yellow in the gills I'd kiss thee. Art for Gloucester?"

"I am."

"So am I, for to-day; to-morrow I go farther on. Dost know these parts well?"

"There are parts that I know worse; but I am not native to the place."

"Maybe thou hast never been in Dean Forest?"

The stranger looked at the sailor sharply and queerly. "Dean Forest," he repeated. "Yes, I have travelled some parts of that wild region. Thou art surely not thinking of going thither at this time o' the year!"

"By bad fortune, I am. And from what I hear, 'tis a dangerous place, full of fierce beasts and uncouth people. But go thither I must, for I seek a man I shall not find elsewhere. If thou wouldst find a hawk, needs must that thou find a hawk's nest; no other bird's will serve thy purpose—that is my position. Is there any chance that I shall light upon some forest fellow during Yule-tide business in Gloucester?"

"That I cannot say; but I may be able to help thee. Whom dost thou seek?"

"A Devon man, Rob of Paignton."

"Thou art hunting a bundle of hay to find a needle. The forest is a wild place, as full of holes as of hills, and its people are not much given to travelling or to gossip with any but their nearest neighbours. Hast no more precise knowledge?"

"None, except that Rob dwells with a tall fellow named Morgan."

Again the sallow stranger eyed his companion keenly. He shook his head. "Tall fellows are not scarce amongst the foresters, and Morgans are as plentiful as oak trees."

"Then am I like to be long a-searching. However, tired eyes ne'er found a treasure; I must find Rob and the fellow with whom he dwells. How far is it to Gloucester now?"

"A matter of less than three miles to the Cross."

"Dost know of a good inn, one where beef and ale is not stinted, and where the hay in the beds is sweet?"

"There's the 'New Inn' in the Northgate Street, as snug a place as a man can wish to put head into on a cold day. I shall rest there until to-morrow."

"Then I'll cast anchor there also. I can afford to pay for good lodgings." The sailor jingled some coins in his pouch, and sang again,

> "Then ho! for the Spanish Main,
> And ha! for the Spanish gold."

His companion interrupted him. "When I startled thee just now, did I not hear thy lips utter a Spanish oath?"

"Likely enough; I have a goodly stock of them, and one jumps out at times if it happens to be near the top. How didst thou recognize it for Spanish?"

"Because I have some knowledge of that tongue."

The sailor turned sharp on the speaker, halted, and scrutinized him closely. "Thy face is yellow enough for a subject of King Philip," he said slowly; "but the general cut of thee is English."

"I am English."

"Hast sailed the Spanish Main?"

"No; I am a scholar, not a sailor. I am as well acquainted with French, Latin, and Greek as with Spanish and English."

"What a gift!" exclaimed the sailor admiringly. "There is not much body about thee; but now I look into thy face and mark thine eyes, forehead, and jowl, can well credit thee with brains. I wish I had met thee in Plymouth."

"Why, friend?"

"Because I have some papers writ in Spanish that I'd give much to decipher. Confidence for confidence, let me tell thee that I am no scholar, but just a simple sailor—"

"Who knows the Spanish Main, eh?"

"As a farmer knows his own duck pond."

"Ah! these are fine times for the brave lads who sail the seas."

"My own opinion, brother. I thank God I became a man whilst Queen Bess was a woman! The west wind blows fortunes into Devon ports nowadays. Mayhap thou hast no love for the sea?"

"'Tis the sea that hath no love for me. I am fixed ashore, and yet I love travel and adventure, and have seen sights in more lands than England."

"So! now. I'm glad thou hast not lived a worm 'twixt book covers. Thou art a fellow of some parts, I'll warrant me. There's plenty of spring in thy walk for one who hath pored much over books. How art thou now with, say, the sword?"

"I have held my own with fellows of more inches than myself."

The sailor pinched his companion's biceps, and took a grip of his wrist. "Supple enough, brother, or I'm no judge."

"Oh! I should second thee well in a tussle, never fear," laughed the little man.

"And give me a merry time should we draw on one another."

"Oh! we are not going to fight. I am a peaceable wayfarer, glad of a cheery companion on a dull day. But I would offer thee a scrap of advice. Jingle not thy money so easily to the first man that offers thee a friendly greeting. I have known the chink of gold turn a good friend into an ill foe."

"True, true. But I'll swear to thy honesty."

"A thousand thanks for the compliment."

Thus the two chance companions trudged on side by side to the south gate of Gloucester. There the pressure of a crowd brought them to a halt for a few minutes. There was a noise of yelling and booing, and some exclamations that caused the sailor's companion to wince.

The pressure at the gate slackening, the two pushed through and hurried after the noisy throng. "Some fellow being whipped at the cart-tail," exclaimed the man of Devon, stretching his tall form to look over the heads of the swaying mob.

"Two of 'em, friend; Papishers both," remarked a delighted citizen.

"Oh!" exclaimed the younger wayfarer.

The citizen pointed first to the right and then to the left. "Ruins of Greyfriars Monastery; ruins of Blackfriars. One rascal caught in either place praying that the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah might fall on our town, because he and his fellow vermin were driven out years ago. I must push ahead and beg the hangman to let me have a cut or two at them. They cursed me by bell, book, and candle—but not by name, thank the Lord: they didn't know that!"

"Why?" asked the little man.

"Because I—and many others, for the matter of that—have built a snug house out of the stone of the monasteries. I'll have a cut at 'em if it costs me a crown."

"Is this sort of thing to thy liking?" the sailor asked of his companion.

"No," was the sharp response.

"Neither is it to mine; although, mind you, I have seen these same Papishers play some devil's tricks on good Protestants. Paignton Rob, whom I seek, hath a head ill-balanced by the loss of an ear and its ear-ring, because the priests chose to set a mark upon him. But thou and I are of more generous blood; we have seen the world, and found honest men in all religions—ay, and rogues in them all too. Let us get to thine inn and drink a flagon of Gloster ale to all tolerant souls, whether they call the Pope 'Father' or 'Devil.'"

The sallow-faced man made no answer, but pushed on beside his burly companion.

Chapter XXV.

BROTHER BASIL.

Dan Pengelly, the sailor with the Cornish patronymic and Devonian birthplace, found an excellent boon companion in the little sallow-faced fellow who had overtaken him a few miles south of Gloucester. And he found the "New Inn," boastful of having given a night's lodging to the Queen and the Earl of Leicester, an expensive but comfortable tavern. Its dimensions were goodly, its position a sheltered one, its kitchens ample and well-managed, and its October ale beyond reproach. At first the little man in black doublet and hosen was inclined to be moody and taciturn; the public whipping, apparently, had seared his kindly and humane temperament. But jolly Dan poured oil—not to say ale—on the wounds and eased them. As it was neither dinner-time nor supper-time, the sailor ordered a repast ample enough for both, and fell to his trencher with hearty good will. His companion did his best to emulate him, and for a spare man did excellently. Dan paid the reckoning.

They spent a merry evening. As far as the sailor was concerned, when ale went in, wit went out; he poured out confidences, and was artfully led into babbling secrets he had never intended to disclose. To all appearances the little man was just as communicative; he talked glibly enough about places in France, Holland, and Spain, and answered a score of eager questions about Antwerp, Amsterdam, Paris, Lisbon, Cadiz, and other places. But when Pengelly reeled off

to his mattress of fragrant hay he knew nothing definite about his comrade—neither name, station, occupation, nor religious or political opinions. On the other hand, the sallow man knew Dan's lineage for four generations back, at least; knew his hopes, fears, recent deeds—good and bad; could have told to a penny what money he had in his pocket; knew the reason why he sought Rob of Paignton, and a great deal of the latter worthy's past career. Perhaps most important of all, he knew where Dan had hidden certain Spanish papers in Plymouth, and guessed at the secret hidden in them. He had been merry with the bluff sailor to good purpose, and he lay awake and quietly smiling at a star that peeped in at the lattice, long after the bibulous Dan had started snoring like a drenched hog on the pallet beside him. Before he closed his eyes and settled himself to sleep, he had resolved to be the sailor's companion for a day longer. This meant an alteration of his previous plans, but the change would be worth the making.

The next morning the two travellers were astir with the first robin, and over breakfast Dan learned that his companion had suddenly remembered that he ought to pay a visit to Westbury before he quitted the neighbourhood. The Devonian knew nothing of Westbury, but was speedily informed that it lay about ten miles along his own route, and was, in fact, almost at the eastern verge of the forest itself. The sailor expressed his joy at this news in a practical manner; he insisted on paying the reckoning for bed and breakfast. The little man made a show of protest, but submitted amicably enough. The generous Dan slapped him on the back, and declared that he was growing to love him.

"I did not like thee over well at first," he said; "there are none of the roses of innocence in thy face, thy jaws are too lean and hungry looking, and thine eyes have an odd sort of stare in them. But 'handsome is that handsome does' is my motto, and I find thee a downright pretty fellow."

The "pretty fellow" laughed good-humouredly. "Thou hast queer ways of paying compliments, Dan Pengelly, and folk who did not understand thee might take offence. But it's 'peace and good fellowship' betwixt us twain; so let us take to the road and hope for a pleasant journey."

The sun shone frostily but cheerily. Down the Westgate Street and out at the West Gate that abutted on the turbid Severn went the two strangely assorted comrades. The sailor had a remark or two—not altogether complimentary—to make about the river. Then they strode along the causeway that spanned the

marshy isle of Olney and led to the western arm of the river. From thence a broad, tree-bordered highway ran—at a little distance from the Severn bank—right away to the hamlet of Westbury. Here they parted company, the sailor going on to Newnham, where he was to make inquiries after Rob, his companion striking off across the fields on pretence of visiting a certain farmer.

Dan was right on the track of his friend, although he anticipated a dangerous and exciting search through the dense, dark forest that rose on the swelling hills before him. He was agreeably disappointed. A grizzled old fisherman stood on the river quay idly watching his boat as it bobbed up and down on the rushing tide. Dan gave him a brotherly greeting, then halted for a few minutes' rest and conversation. At first the traveller talked of "tides" as though they were his chief interest in life. The fisherman had an opportunity of learning that the tides of the Plym, Fal, and Dart were beyond computation better than those of the Severn; in fact, he was asked to believe that the last-named river was no better than a mud heap that got flooded with brackish water twice a day. The fisherman stoutly combated this slander, and a pretty quarrel seemed imminent, when Dan went off at a tangent, and "wondered" whether any one in Newnham had espied a tall, lean, one-eared man looking at boat or stream at any time. "He's not a native of these parts," added he, by way of rounding off his description.

But the fisherman was not prepared for this sudden change of subject, and he took a minute or two for quiet meditation ere he volunteered the information that "all Newnham" knew the person in question.

"He was up to Captain Dawe's but yesterday," he said.

"Ought to be dwelling with a tall fellow named Morgan," said Dan.

"Lives with Johnnie Morgan of Blakeney," replied the other. "Everybody knows Johnnie Morgan. He's kissed the Queen's hand in her house in London, and 'tis whispered that her Majesty kissed him. At any rate, Johnnie's sweetheart quarrelled with him directly they got home again, and the gossips put it down to jealousy."

Dan expressed his sorrow, and promised to advise Johnnie to hope for a happy ending. "The course of true love never did run smooth, ye know."

"Never!" assented the fisherman.

"Now, how far is it to Blakeney, and must I go through the forest?"

"'Tis an afternoon's tramp, and a lonesome one; ye might run down on the tide when it ebbs. There's my boat, and I'll take ye for twopence."

"Done! Shall we spill a flagon of ale, and say it is a bargain?"

The fisherman put his tongue to his lips and tested the salty flavour of the tide, then led the way without comment to the "Bear." The bargain was so deluged with "best October" that it was almost drowned in forgetfulness. But, more by luck than judgment, Dan and Rob kissed one another just after nightfall.

And after supper Dan told the story of his tramp from Bristol. He had got to the "whipping" incident in Gloucester, and was describing its effect upon the little, sallow-faced fellow that tramped with him, when one of Morgan's men burst into the room, his face blanched with terror. "The man in black! the man in black!" he cried.

Johnnie was on his feet in an instant. "What dost thou mean?" he asked.

"The man in black! the one who did not die!"

Johnnie understood. He took down a sword. "Where is he?"

"He was looking in at the window as I came up the lane."

"Follow me. Stay you there, gentlemen; I'm afeard my man has seen a ghost."

Blakeney was aroused, but no man had seen anything suspicious, and a close search revealed nothing. Morgan questioned his man, but he stuck to his story. An idea flashed across Johnnie's mind, and when he got home again he questioned Pengelly closely about his companion. The answers convinced him.

"Thou hast tramped with the devil in disguise," he said.

Dan's ruddy face paled, and he asked for an explanation. His host told him of the events of the past summer. The sailor's face lengthened with the story. "And I told him all my plans!" he groaned.

That night Morgan's barns were fired and burned to the ground. The next

night the thatch of Captain Dawe's cottage was discovered to be smouldering. Two nights later, Dean Tower, which had been confiscated by the Crown because of Windybank's treason, was reduced to a heap of ashes.

Brother Basil stole out of Westbury tower the next morning. He had a bloodstained chip of oak in his hand. It was cut from a beam Windybank had struck in his fall. "The blood of a martyr!" he muttered.

Chapter XXVI.

ALL ON A BRIGHT MARCH MORNING.

The March winds were blowing, and the daffydowndillies were nodding merry heads in the sunshine. The hawthorn hedges were dotted with the bright green of bursting buds; and behind this promise of cover from the prying eyes of predatory urchins, the small birds were busy house-building. The tall elms were still bare of leaves, but the rooks had framed their crazy nests, and were now busy following the ploughman, and waxing fat on succulent worms. The sedgy pools and ditches in the forest were noisy with the hoarse croaking of colonies of frogs. Lambs skipped in the farmers' meadows, and cropped the grass that had already lost the brown tinge of winter.

Spring was come, vouched for by the calendar, the place of King Sol in the blue heavens, and the changing aspect of reawakening nature.

By every token of a healthy youth and a glorious March morning, Johnnie's thoughts should have been light, fanciful, and centred round the fair image of Mistress Dorothy Dawe. Alas! they were dark as a midwinter night, and as gloomy as a funeral oration.

> "'She only drove me to despair,
> When—she—un-kind—did—prove.'"

Johnnie hummed the last few bars of a popular madrigal in slow and dirge-

like tones. "She" was still wayward and unkind, and "He" was setting out on the morrow in search of treasure to lay at a maiden's feet. The young fellow's visions of the Indies were no longer rosy, but drab as November skies. He was pledged to set his face westward ho! but the zest was gone out of the enterprise. He leaned over a gate, and watched the gulls fishing in the river.

Johnnie did not hear a light step coming down the meadow towards him; no sound disturbed his melancholy reflections. "Jack!" murmured a soft voice.

The young man started as though an arrow had struck him. His face flushed hotly, and a gleam of pleasure lighted up its gloom.

"Good morrow, Mistress Dorothy," he said. "I suppose thy father waits at the house? I will go to him at once."

He turned from the stile; but on his arm there was the flutter of a hand like to the flutter of a bird's wing, and he stopped. He turned to look at the river again, and the maiden's eyes followed his. There was silence whilst a man might have told ten score.

"The wings of the gulls flash like silver in the sunshine," ventured Dorothy.

"So I have thought."

A pause.

"Thou art leaving us to-morrow."

"That is why I have been watching the gulls for near an hour."

"I don't understand."

"Paignton Rob says that these white gulls are found all the world over. I shall see them a thousand leagues away—screaming round the ship; massing in white armies on the New World cliffs; fishing in the rivers. My last vision of home must have white gulls in it. Away yonder they will be fairy birds to me, calling up pictures of my ancestral homestead along Severn side. The forests there will not recall the forest here. How shall their stifling heat and towering palms, their gaudy birds and flowers, their roaring beasts and loathly reptiles, remind one of the cool, sweet glades, the scented bracken, the gnarled oaks, the leaping deer,

and sweet-throated songsters of home? 'Tis the vision of the river, the tide, and the wheeling gulls that I shall see again in the land of 'El Dorado.'"

There was a sadness and pathos in the forester's voice that went straight to the heart of the forest maiden. The hand was on his arm again, fluttering, trembling. "I have been very wicked!" The fluty notes of a sweet voice were broken.

"Who says so?" demanded Johnnie harshly and loudly.

"I do; you do."

"I do not!"

"But I have hurt you."

"Why shouldn't you do so, if it pleases you? Women must aye be meddling with pins and barbs. If they be not pricking velvets or home-spun, they must be thrusting sharp points into those that love them best. Why shouldst thou differ from others of thy sex?"

The young man's voice was bitter; the barbs still rankled. They had been long in the wounds they had made, and there was fiery inflammation. How often had he told the maid that she was like none other of her sex; that she was peerless—stood alone! The memory of former passionate declarations flashed across the minds of them both, and both sighed down into silence.

"Wilt thou not forgive me?"

"Why didst thou flout me, Dolly?"

"Just a maid's foolish temper. Think how full of whimsies we women be. Men be not so; they have strength denied to us, the weaker vessel." (Johnnie's face was visibly softening. Dolly sighed with renewed hope, and went on.) "I was hurt because thou didst plan and resolve to go to the Indies without ever a word to me. I was not thought on. The Queen moves a finger, and straightway thou art fashioning wings to take thee to the ends of the earth. 'Twas thy duty so to do, but why treat me as a chit or child of no account? Thy head was ever bobbing against that of Master Jeffreys, or pouring plans into the one ear of Paignton Rob. 'Mum' was the word if ye did but catch the rustle of my gown. Thou hadst vowed to share thy life with me; yet there did ye sit, like

conspirators, planning momentous issues in life, with never a chance for me to utter 'Yea' or 'Nay.' Was that just?"

"I told thee of my resolve as soon as I had made it firm."

"That was a day too late for my pride. The Dawes have some pride, Jack Morgan."

"They have reason for it, Mistress Dawe."

"Their friends should respect it."

"I was hoping to increase it. Why, thinkest thou, did I resolve to risk life and limb in the Indies, unless to gather wealth, that I might lay it at thy feet?"

"Nay; thou wert bitten by the flea of adventure, and must needs rush about the world to deaden the itching. Suppose that I had rather have thee remain at home, being but a plain maid, who would find contentment as a farmer's wife?"

The idea had not occurred to Johnnie, and he gasped in astonishment. Dolly saw his confusion, and wisely did not press her point. On the contrary, woman-like, she dropped the whole thread of the argument, and simply exclaimed a little plaintively,—

"I am sore wearied!"

"Wearied!" cried Johnnie, facing round. "Wearied of what?"

"I have walked from Newnham, and 'tis a trying journey with the wind buffeting one so rudely."

"I thought thou hadst ridden with thy father."

"I walked alone; I wanted to see thee alone. Why should we part ill friends, that have loved one another?"

The next moment a tearful maid was in a strong man's arms. All the wrongs on both sides, real and imaginary, were forgiven and forgotten. Two happy, laughing lovers sat and watched the gulls wheeling, dipping, rising in the spring sunshine.

"Thou hast rare roses in thy cheeks, sweetheart," said Johnnie.

"'Tis the wind," replied Dolly.

"'March wind!'" murmured the youth.

"'April showers!'" sobbed the maiden; for she thought of the morrow, and the tears came into the brave blue eyes.

Chapter XXVII.

IN PLYMOUTH.

The arrow sang its curving flight through the air and stuck, with a quick quiver, in the very centre of the target. "Four times out of six have I found his heart, and a pennypiece would cover the four," exclaimed Nick Johnson. "'Twill do!" He put his bow-point to his toe, loosened the string, and laid the weapon aside. Brother Ned slipped his own bow from his shoulder, strung it, tested its tautness and rigidity, and took six arrows from the boy who waited upon the patrons of archery ground. He shot; the arrow went wide. He sighed, rubbed his eyes as though to clear them from mist, and shot again. The shaft lodged on the outer edge of the target, almost splintering the wood. "Better," said Nick encouragingly. Ned shot a third time; the string twanged unevenly, and the arrow fell short. With a groan of despair the sailor threw the bow aside, and called to the boy to fetch the arrows. "'Tis no use," he cried; "I shall ne'er master the trick on't again; left hand and eye will not go together as did right hand and eye in the old days. Time was when I could outshoot thee three matches in four; now should I miss the side of a house at a hundred paces. Thy left arm serves thee better than thy right ever did. I know no better marksman."

Nick pulled musingly at his sandy beard. "In truth," he admitted, "it seemeth as though nature intended me for a left-handed man; 'tis wonderful what skill I have acquired with it in a few months of practice. Wilt thou not try again?"

"Not to-day. I'll to the witch-woman under the cliffs, and get her to say some

charms that have power over the left side of a man." Ned strode moodily off, and Nick followed him. At the stile that led into the highway they met Dan Pengelly coming in search of them. Yards away his excited countenance heralded news. "They've turned up at last!" he cried.

"Master Morgan and Rob?"

"No; the Papishers."

"How?"

"Get ye to the 'Blue Dolphin,' and Dame Gregory will tell ye all. I'll be in hiding on the opposite side of the way, and a whistle will bring me across. Give your legs full play. I'll not be seen with ye. Needs must that we deal craftily when the devil's in person amongst the foe."

"Rest easy, Dan. Come on, Ned," cried Nick. And the two brothers swung off for the harbour side of the town and the back parlour of the "Blue Dolphin." Whilst they clatter along the cobbled highway, we will explain their errand.

When Dan Pengelly babbled secrets into the ears of Brother Basil, he unwittingly gave that worthy a new scheme of revenge. For some months after the failure of the plot to burn the forest, the ex-monk had remained in hiding amidst the mountains of South Wales. He stayed near Newnham long enough to learn from the farmer at Arlingham the precise fate of Father Jerome, his co-conspirator John, and Andrew Windybank. Being assured of their deaths, and the absolute failure of the Spanish plot, he disappeared. The foresters hoped, and at length believed, that he was dead; they had learned that he was the fiercest and most unscrupulous of the fanatics, and rumour had quickly clothed him with all sorts of unholy attributes. That he was not dead, but plotting further mischief, was known only to one man, and the knowledge helped to darken that man's life. The farmer at Arlingham had never been suspected of complicity in the plot; all, save Basil, who could have blabbed his secret were amongst the slain on the night of the fight with the *Luath*. He himself lost heart at the critical moment and stayed at home, and his only share in the affair was to provide for some of the wounded and receive the thanks of the admiral for his ready generosity. Yet, whilst the wounded groaned and tossed on his beds, Basil lay curled up, wolf fashion, in one of the barns. He lodged there again for two days after the burning of Dean Tower, and whilst the forest was being scoured with horse and hound

for him. From thence he had journeyed to Plymouth, hoping to secure the Spanish papers hidden by the garrulous seaman. He succeeded in his object only a few hours before Dan came hastening back from Blakeney, fearful for the safety of his precious packet. The trick had been neatly played. Dame Gregory had entertained, for one night, a very pleasant and gentlemanly guest, who had speedily found his way into her good graces, and also into the back parlour of the "Blue Dolphin," which was sacred to the intimate cronies of her sailor spouse. It was there, behind a panel in the wall, that the hostess kept treasures belonging to several homeless mariners and adventurers who made her their banker and confidential agent. The foolish Dan, tipsily anxious to let his little comrade know how cunning he was, had explained the working of the panel and the difficulty of any one, save those in the secret, getting access to the precious hoard behind it. An evening's survey matured Basil's plans. Early the next morning two strange sailor-men entered the inn, and kept the landlady answering questions for the best part of half an hour. Not long after she was rid of them, her pleasant guest also bade her good day and departed.

No suspicions were aroused until Dan's return and discovery of his loss. Then Basil's handiwork was apparent enough. His connection with the two sailors was revealed in an early stage of Dan's search for the thief. The three had been seen together in a neighbouring hostel the previous day. No trace of them was discovered after the robbery. But now, on the very eve of Morgan's arrival in Plymouth, Dame Gregory's son, an urchin of about fourteen summers, had penetrated the rough disguise of two mariners who had dropped into the kitchen of the "Blue Dolphin." Guided by the child's eyes, the mother also had assured herself of the identity of the two. Dan had been apprised, had given the alarm to the Johnsons, and they were already lifting the latch of the parlour door. The two spies were on the ale-bench in the kitchen.

There was a whispered consultation with the hostess. Was she sure of her men? Quite. What was Dan going to do in the affair? Watch, in the hope that the sallow priest-man would pass along by the inn.

Nick and Ned entered the kitchen. They were taciturn fellows, but they gave the strangers a nod and a good-morrow! Conversation began, the Johnsons leaving the lead, after the first words, to the strangers. In those stirring times it was impossible for four mariners to meet in Plymouth town and refrain from talking about the wonderful New World across the Atlantic. All four had sailed its seas and navigated its rivers. Nick Johnson said many hard things of the

Spaniards, and he expected the strangers to champion them a little. They did not; on the other hand, they heaped curses on the heads of the arrogant Dons. The talk turned on "El Dorado" and the fabulous treasures he had heaped up. The Johnsons were eager with inquiries, but had no information to offer. The strangers pretended to know a great deal about the mysterious Indian potentate and his golden land, but they winked at one another and kept their counsel. Ned Johnson made a plunge. Did the strangers know that a ship was actually fitting in Plymouth harbour for an unnamed port on the Orinoco? They did, and thought of trying for a berth in her, having information that would be valuable to her captain. By a casual remark, Ned hinted that he had personal knowledge of some of the co-owners of the *Golden Boar*. Instantly a flood of questions poured forth, but no answers were returned. The brothers professed a bond of secrecy. For a full hour a cunning game was played, two against two, but neither side secured an advantage. The strangers departed, having promised the Johnsons to meet the next morning at an inn lower down the harbour.

The spies were followed to their lodging-place, and a watch set upon them. But Basil was wary and made no sign. For two or three days the four sailors fraternized together, and Dan Pengelly and the landlady's son hung about in their neighbourhood, hoping to catch sight of a familiar and cunning face. Meanwhile the last touches were being given to the *Golden Boar*; her captain, John Drake, younger brother of the famous admiral, was daily aboard, and her three principal owners—Raleigh, Johnnie Morgan, and Captain Dawe—had arrived in Plymouth. They had given up all hope of seeing Dan's mysterious Spanish papers. But hope was not dead in the volatile Dan.

Chapter XXVIII.

THE PARLOUR OF THE "BLUE DOLPHIN."

On the Cornish side of the Sound, and directly facing the harbour of Plymouth, lay a snug fisher village. In the gray, weather-beaten church were plentiful records of the births, marriages, and deaths of the Pengellys. The homeless and wandering Dan might have claimed relationship with half the inhabitants of the place had he chosen to do so. Yet, being Plymouth born and at

sea four-fifths of his time, he had never visited the place since his boyhood. He thought less of a voyage to the Indies than of a trip across the estuary of the Tamar. And in this place, that echoed with his family name, and where he himself might walk as a stranger, lodged the man he sought in every street, byway, and tavern in Plymouth.

Dan had been down to the *Golden Boar*, and had talked with Captain Drake and Master Morgan. They wanted news of his papers; he could give them none.

"Then," said John Drake, "we can wait here no longer. Maybe thy papers would give us the very route to 'El Dorado's' land, and save us a world of danger and trouble; maybe they are about some other matter entirely. In any case, I must sail in three days' time. We are thoroughly armed, manned, and victualled; winter is gone, and the winds will serve. 'Tis westward ho! and take the risks that other bold fellows have taken before us. Yet I had rather the little priest had not gotten the manuscript from thee. The cunning thief may be garnering gold whilst we but reap wounds and fever. The New World is a big place, the Orinoco a mighty stream; no man can say what lands lie along its margin, and what mighty nations dwell on those lands. I have no fear of the night, but 'tis a good thing to have a lantern in hand when one walks in dark places."

Master Morgan agreed, and Dan resolved upon a desperate attempt to recover his lost treasure. He left the harbour, sought and found the Johnsons, and formulated a plan of action.

An hour or so later, Nick and Ned and the two stranger mariners entered the "Blue Dolphin," and begged the landlady to grant them the use of her parlour, as they wished to talk over a private matter of great importance. The good woman assented with pleasure, and promised them freedom from interruption. They went in, and upon their very heels came Dan. He said something to the hostess in a low voice. She protested volubly and angrily. He wheedled and coaxed, and at length, very reluctantly, she relented. Dan tapped at the door thrice separately and significantly. "This is our friend," said Nick Johnson, and he opened the door to admit him who knocked. The strangers stared at Dan; but, never having seen him before, had no suspicion of his identity.

All five sat down at the table, the two strangers with their backs to the fireplace, the three friends facing them, with their backs to the door. Dan did the talking, addressing himself to Basil's henchmen.

"These two good fellows," he said, "old shipmates of mine, have arranged this pleasant meeting at my request. I have heard somewhat of you, and learn that we are all greatly interested in a certain matter. If I just mention 'Indies,' 'Dons,' 'gold,' you will guess the run of my thoughts."

The strangers nodded, and settled themselves into an attitude of closer attention.

"There's a vessel in harbour almost ready to weigh anchor for the land of the setting sun. Her aim is treasure. I sail in her, and I am in the secret councils of her captain. Do you follow my thoughts?"

"Perfectly. You've some bold business on hand for dipping your hands deep into the spoil of the voyage, and you want a few bold blades at your back. Say no more. Get us aboard, and when you give the signal we're with you. To tell you the truth, we were planning some such scheme ourselves, but could see no chance of a berth on the vessel."

"I'm glad you're the stout fellows I took you to be. Now, don't be surprised at what I say next. I have more than one man's secrets locked in my bosom." Dan turned to Nick Johnson. "Just make sure there are no eavesdroppers," he said.

Nick looked out into the passage. "Not a mouse stirring."

"Then, whilst thou art on thy legs, fetch in some ale. Our new comrades would like to toast our enterprise."

Dan leaned back in silence whilst Nick did his errand. Healths were drunk without words—just a nod, as much as to say, "To you, my hearty!"

Dan leaned across the table. "A thin, wiry, sallow-faced man; black-haired, black-eyed, supple as an eel, cunning as a cat; a scholar and travelled gentleman, who might easily be a cut-throat; one who professes the old faith, and swears by the Pope—ye know him?"

The elder of the two spies licked his lips uneasily, looked hurriedly from his companion to Dan, and from Dan back to his companion. The latter stared and blinked his eyes in embarrassment.

"Ye helped him in a little job in this very house about three months ago,"

pursued Dan. "D'ye know what he got out of it?"

"No."

"The very thing we want to get out of him. A sailor hid some papers in this very house—papers that point the way to untold wealth, the way to 'El Dorado's' land. I was with him when he learned the secret, and hurried back here to lay hands upon the precious packet. I was a little behind time. Now, if we are going in the *Golden Boar*, we must carry those papers with us. Ye both unwittingly played stalking-horse whilst another man got the treasure."

"And he paid us scurvily, the yellow-faced rascal!" cried the spies.

"And he will pay ye scurvily for spying upon the *Golden Boar* and Master Morgan, whom he hates. D'ye see how well I know the fellow and all his secrets? I could hang him an I could but lay hands on him. Are we to go on a blind expedition to the Indies, he laughing at us from the quayside, and straightway fitting a vessel at his leisure to garner in the wealth we may search for in vain?"

"By the saints, no! But we took him for an honester man."

"Ye did not know him; I do. Now, where is he to be found? There is no time to lose. I know he's not far off, but I had rather not waste precious hours in searching for him."

The two rascals, astonished at Dan's knowledge of their doings, fell into the trap he set for them. They jumped up. "We'll take ye to him at once!"

"Softly, friends! I know my man and his ways. Did he but catch sight of five of us approaching his hiding-place, we should never get a glimpse of him. Did he but see me with ye, our quest were in vain. Have I not said I know enough of him to hang him? Leave the business to me, and wait here with my friends. Would ye send five dogs barking and tearing through a wood to trap one fox? One silent hound, with a good nose, sharp teeth, silent tongue, and a knowledge of the fox's ways, would serve the purpose better. Let me know the lie of his den, and trust me for the rest."

The fellows fell in with Dan's plan. Truth to tell, they had seen a little of the sinister side of Basil's character, and had a pretty wholesome dread of him. Their

new friend, who knew his man so well, was best fitted for the dangerous enterprise. They wished him joy of it, and would be content to share its fruits. To Dan's astonishment, they told him that Basil was hiding across the Sound in his own ancestral village.

"Heart o' me!" he exclaimed, "he is mine! Yon place is filled with my own kith and kin. The fox is in a very ring of dogs."

"Get not too many helpers, friend," said Nick cunningly, "else will the spoil be split into too many portions."

"Well argued!" exclaimed Basil's dupes. "Too many hands in the meal-tub means small share apiece."

"Never fear, comrades. A buss on the cheek or a handshake will be payment enough. I shall not tell them that they are helping me to lay fingers on the wealth of the Indies. Will ye take another flagon to wish me success? I must be going. The afternoon wears on, and night must be my time for work. Where shall we meet to-morrow?"

"Here, at noon," suggested Ned Johnson.

"Here, at noon," agreed Dan. He got up and went to the street door, and Nick went with him.

"Cunningly managed, Dan," he murmured. '"Tis better than putting sword to their throats and pricking out the information. Art going alone?"

"No; meet me at Ian Davey's boathouse at sunset. Let Ned keep an eye on yon two."

Chapter XXIX.

THE WIDOW'S HOUSE.

The springtide sun set ruddily and frostily across the Sound; and as the fiery

ball hung for a moment on the western shore, a broad pathway like a pathway of rippling blood, or deep-tinged, running gold, went in a line from Ian Davey's boatyard to the Cornish coast.

"An omen!" cried Dan, seeing with the eye of the superstitious sailor. "We sail to wealth over a golden sea."

Nick shook his head. "The colour is not yellow enough for my liking. Is the boat ready?"

"Ay."

"Then let us be going whilst the breeze holds easterly."

Ian Davey's lad came out of the boathouse with a pair of oars on his shoulders. He went down to a little fisher boat that rocked gently against the end of the wooden jetty. The two sailor-men followed him. The mast was stepped, and they pushed out from the shore, the two men rowing and the lad steering. As soon as they were far enough out to catch the breeze the sail was set, and the little craft went bowling along over the fast-darkening sea. The oars were shipped, and Dan fell to musing. He tried to recollect the occasion of his last visit to the Cornish village from which his family had sprung, and was astonished to find that, in the sum of ten thousand leagues of travel since manhood, the little journey he was now taking did not once enter. He stroked his red beard, perplexed at the oddity of the whole thing. He pictured the steep, cobbled street leading up from the shore, and peeped into every remembered window in the row of rude thatched cottages. Slowly he recalled the names of old boy and girl companions who had played with him around the doorstep of his grandfather's house. For half the voyage the object which had prompted it was forgotten. The journey was as silent as a secret journey should be. It began in twilight and ended in darkness. The keel of the boat grated on the soft sand. Dan and Nick Johnson stepped out.

"How long will ye be?" asked Davey's lad.

Dan pondered. "Ye cannot get back without us; 'twill be a matter of hard rowing against the wind. I have been thinking. This place is hallowed soil to me, and my feet have not trodden it for thirty years. Bide thou here to-night; I will find thee supper and a pallet. There are many folk with whom I would fain speak now that I am here. Keep a still tongue concerning us: we will speak for

ourselves. Tie up thy boat, and ask for John Pengelly. If he be dead, ask for any of his children; they will entertain thee for my sake."

Dan took his companion's arm, and climbed the tide-washed bank. He stood for a moment listening and peering into the darkness, then he made for the nearest cottage. The shutter was not closed, and the faint glow of leaping firelight shone through the oiled paper stretched across the bars of the lattice. The sailor turned to the door, and pulled the latch string.

"Peace be to you all, friends," he said. "'Tis the voice of a Pengelly that speaks."

"Come into the light, Pengelly. Your tongue doth not ring familiarly," came the answer.

Dan stepped forward, leaving Nick on the threshold.

A young fisherman and his wife sat in the narrow arc of the firelight, and beside them, on a deerskin, their little son basked in the genial warmth. The breeze through the open door fanned the glowing wood into flame.

"Close the door, friend," said the fisherman.

"I have a comrade on the threshold."

"Then bring him in."

Nick entered, apologizing for his intrusion, and giving his name, town, and profession as a guarantee of his honesty of purpose.

"Ye are welcome both," replied the fisherman. "We have supped, but the wife shall set meat and drink before you."

"We are fresh from eating and drinking," said Dan, "and have but looked in for a little chat, seeing that ye were not abed."

"Say your say, friends."

Dan did so, in his own roundabout fashion. He casually mentioned his voyages to the West, a theme of unfailing interest to any man dwelling on the

shores of Plymouth Sound. Then he came to the real reason for his visit. He described the two sailors he had met in Plymouth. The fisherman had never seen them. Dan had guessed as much, but he wanted to be sure. Then he sketched Basil. The fisherman sat upright in a moment.

"I know him," he cried. "He has been amongst us, off and on, for more than a month. I'll take you to him."

But Dan would not trouble any one to do that.

"He knows me well enough," he replied, "and I would rather take him by surprise. We had a jolly time together last Christmas."

So the fisherman pointed out where Basil was staying, and his two callers took their leave, promising to look in upon him again in the morning.

Apart from the row of cottages stood the house in which Brother Basil was staying. At one time the place had made some pretensions to smartness. It was stone-built throughout and tiled. In the rear was an orchard of apple-trees; and a herb garden, now choked with weeds, separated the front of the house from the roadway. The place was in the occupation of a widow woman, whose late husband had once been a man of some means.

The night was sufficiently starlit for a sailor to pick his way with certainty, and the two men went rapidly forward. The gate in the fence stood ajar, and Dan went first to spy out the land. The front window was heavily shuttered, an unusual precaution to take on a fine night. Putting his eye to a chink, the sailor could just discern the shadowy outline of a man seated at a table. A rushlight stood beside him, and apparently he was reading. Passing on to the door, he found that the latch-string was pulled in through the latch-hole; the door was secure. Steadily, Dan pressed against it; it was firm as the wall, no play to and fro on latch and hinge. "Bolted," he muttered, and stole back to the fence, in whose shadow Nick was still standing. He whispered his report, and the two consulted together for a moment. Then both went round to the orchard, stole through a gap in the straggling hedge, and came over the grass to the rear of the house. A light shone through the unshuttered window.

"Ah!" exclaimed Dan, "this looks more like the home of honest people. Yon thief in front is bolted and barred. I warrant me the widow hath not pulled in her latch-string. We must open and enter. To knock would be to give warning to our

man, who hath ears that gather sound quicker than doth a rabbit's."

"How will the widow take our incoming?" asked Nick. "We be two strangers, and night hath fallen. Should she cry out, we are undone; for the fishers would come upon us, and maybe lay us low without a chance to explain our errand. Thy monk-man, too, is a guest of the village. Should he sound an alarm, 'twould go hard with us if the neighbours took us for thieves and him for an honest man."

Dan paused. "Shrewdly spoken, comrade. But there is no time to go round the place and prove that we be honest Protestants and good sailors, whilst the little man is a thieving Papist and murderous traitor. We should cause clamour enough to give him warning and time for escape. We will get within. Thou wilt stay with the widow, and keep her from doing us a mischief. I will see to my man alone."

"If thou shouldst want help?"

"I will cry out for it quickly enough."

As Dan predicted, the latch-string still hung out. A gentle pull, and the well-used door swung open. The widow was in her kitchen, raking together the red embers on the hearth preparatory to going to bed. The noise of her scraping was sufficient to cover up the sounds at the door, and Dan was at her side, his fingers on her lips, ere she was aware of his presence.

"Sh!" he whispered in warning; "not a sound, good mother. We are friends, but thou art in danger; thy life depends on thy silence."

The poor woman paled, and shook in every limb. Dan whispered reassuringly, and removed his hand from her mouth.

"God 'a mercy!" she gasped.

Nick brought forward a stool and gently placed her upon it.

"Have no fear," he said; "I will stay with thee."

"Who are ye?"

"Friends and protectors, mother; honest sons of Devon, who have discovered a deadly plot. Lean thou on my shoulder."

Nick's whispers were soothing, his face was honest; the widow's brain was bewildered. She believed him, and clung to him in white terror. Dan saw that she was safe from any hysterical screaming, enjoined silence on both, and passed on towards the parlour where Basil was sitting. He paused for a moment to draw his sword, then tip-toed to the door. Leaning against the oaken post, he heard the rustling of paper. He set his teeth; there was a flash of light; the door had been opened and shut again, and the sailor and the Spanish agent stood face to face.

Basil's first emotion was one of the most absolute and complete astonishment. So surprised was he that he actually sat and rubbed his eyes as though to clear them from deluding visions. And in just that moment of stupefaction Dan acted. The papers were on the table: doubtless they were his papers. He lunged forward, spitted them on the point of his sword, and crammed them into his doublet by the time Basil was on his feet, and a dagger in his hand. The sailor expected a vicious spring from his adversary, but Basil made no move forward. His quondam roadside companion had the advantage of him in height, reach, and length of weapon, and he had related sufficient of his exploits during their Yuletide tramp to prove himself an apt swordsman. The ex-monk had been trained in a school that set guile above force. He saw at once that his tongue would be his better weapon, so put his dagger back into his belt, sat down and snuffed his candle.

"Thou art not going to fight?"

"Why should we do so? Sit down, Dan Pengelly, and explain thyself."

It was the sailor's turn to be astonished. He got a stool and seated himself, his back to the door, and his weapon across his knee. Basil laughed with assumed good-humour.

"Thou art careful, comrade."

"Thou hast tricked me once."

"And thou hast neatly tricked me. We cry 'quits.'"

"Not so."

"Why not? I have thy papers—I make no secret of that—and thou hast mine."

"Are not these the same?"

"No. But let us exchange, and give over all talk of robbery." Basil got up and went to a little press in the wall. Before opening the door he turned again to Dan. "Thou wilt observe that I am not afraid of turning my back to thee. I have more faith in thine honour than thou hast in mine."

The sailor flushed and fidgeted. "Thou didst deceive me under the guise of friendship," he muttered.

"Pshaw, man! thou wert undone by thine own foolishness. Why didst chatter to a stranger about thy papers? Is not all England agog to find the land of 'El Dorado'? Dost think that any man breathing could resist the temptation to gain a knowledge of the way thither? I suffer from no gold hunger, but I would like the honour of discovering that notable country. So wouldst thou; so would Admiral Drake. I shall have done thee no harm, but rather given thee a lesson in caution if I restore thy papers."

"Wilt do so?"

Basil opened the press, and tossed a packet on the table. "There they are."

Dan snatched it up, and turned it round and round in his fingers. "Why dost thou give them back?"

"They are thine, and thou hast come for them."

"Hast read them?"

"Of course."

"What is in them?"

"Maybe truth, maybe idle tales; their value remains to be proven. Come, thou hast thy packet; give me mine."

A cunning gleam came into the sailor's eyes. "I have not read thine. Can we fairly cry quits until I have done so?"

Basil bit his lip. "Canst read?"

"No."

"Then let me read them to thee. They are part of a treatise on philosophy which I am writing. The opinion of a plain man upon it would be valuable. I should like to have thine."

But Dan was no philosopher, and his present adversary had given him an excellent lesson in caution. He thrust his own packet into his doublet, to lie side by side with the other papers.

"Master Priest, Papist, and spy of Spain—for so I learn thou art—thy work is more likely to be the hatching of plots than the writing of learned books. Thou didst keep my papers for a time quite against my will, and without my consent; therefore shall I hold thine until I learn their contents. Tit for tat is reasonable justice 'twixt man and man."

Basil laughed. "Read me thy riddle," he said. "The world is narrow; thou art surely confounding me with some other man."

"That is possible. A few hours will decide the point. A certain Master Morgan of Gloucestershire and a well-known knight, Sir Walter Raleigh of Sherborne, are yonder in Plymouth town, and will be able to testify for or against thee. Thou shalt be haled before them to-morrow."

"That's work for a strong man, Dan Pengelly."

"There are many of my family in this village, and I did not come alone from Plymouth. The widow hath bonny company in the kitchen."

Basil's face blazed. "'Tis she hath betrayed me."

"Not so. We scared her worse than we scared thee."

Basil sat silent for a while, and Dan drummed on his sword-hilt with his fingers. At length the spy spoke again.

"I suppose it is useless to argue with thee?"

"I never had any head for disputations."

"Very well then, ye must be my guests for the night. Call thy friends from the kitchen, ask the widow for some ale, and let her be getting to bed. Thou and I may get to blows if we sit alone."

Dan stared. His prisoner was actually asking for an increased guard, and would be glad of more company. Not suspecting any trick, but determined not to be caught napping, he got up, opened the door, and stood with his hand on the latch calling for Nick. He bellowed twice before he got an answer. With Nick's answering shout he caught sound of a sudden crash in the room behind. He bounded back. Basil was gone; the window was opened. He dashed to the opening, and the trick was disclosed. The prisoner had silently unfastened the shutters, smashed the lattice, and escaped. Nick came running along. The alarm was given, and the whole village awakened to chase the Papist spy. They did not catch him.

Dan returned to Plymouth next morning and handed his papers to Sir Walter. The first packet proved to be a description of "El Dorado's" land, and a guide to the fabled region. It was the work of a Spanish missionary, and was written to King Philip himself. Basil's treatise on philosophy was none other than a letter from a Spanish agent in London, giving particulars of a plot against Elizabeth and in favour of the Queen of Scots. Raleigh declared the latter paper to be of immeasurably greater value than the Orinoco packet. The knight had had experience of such papers before, and knew, only too well, that they contained more fable than fact. He handed them to Captain John Drake, and left it to him and the gentlemen adventurers who were to sail with him to decide what faith they should put in the missionary's disclosures.

Chapter XXX.

HO! FOR THE SPANISH MAIN.

With a brisk nor'easterly breeze behind her, the *Golden Boar* slipped through the sunlit waters of Plymouth Sound as gracefully as a fair swan might cleave the bosom of a lake. Somewhat narrow in build, moderately low in the waist, with bow and poop not too high-pitched, masts tall and sails ample, she was built with an eye to speed. And with carved posts and rails for her bulwarks, many-windowed cabins in the after part, tapering, artistic prow with the gilded boar rampant, her designer had had an eye to beauty also. Hull and decks were of seasoned English oak, and masts of straight Scots pine. The Knight of Sherborne had found her building in Plymouth dockyard, and had tempted her would-be owner to part with her for a price he could not resist. Captain John Drake had tested her in the Channel from the Goodwins round to Lundy in fair weather and in foul, and had found no fault in her. The critical crowd that stood on the Hoe and watched her as she dipped below the horizon were of opinion that no better-found ship had left the harbour to brave the perils of the Spanish Main. She was of a hundred and fifty tons burthen—a goodly tonnage in those venturesome days—and she carried a captain and crew of twenty men, an equal number of skilled archers, six gunners, and some dozen and a half of gentlemen adventurers, who for the most part could handle rope, sail, sword, bow, pike, or gun as well as any captain might wish. As far as the voyage was concerned, the expedition was under the absolute command of the admiral's brother; on land he was bound to take council with the gentlemen adventurers, all of whom had put some money into the undertaking. Raleigh himself risked the greatest stake, and in order after him came Morgan, Captain Dawe (who did not participate in the voyage itself), the admiral, his brother the skipper, a certain Sir John Trelawny, and Master Timothy Jeffreys, who had secretly speculated his own savings and some of those of Mistress Stowe of Wood Street off Chepe. There was no lack of money in the venture, and the ship was well-found, well-manned, well-armed, and generously provisioned. Dan Pengelly's papers were in the cabin; Dan himself was taking first spell at the helm. Hope was high in every heart, and many a lusty voice joined in the chorus of the helmsman's song:—

"Then ho! for the Spanish Main,
And ha! for the Spanish gold;
King Philip's ships are riding deep
With the weight of wealth untold.

They're prey for the saucy lads
  Who dance on the Plymouth Hoe;
They'll all sail home thro' the fleecy foam,
  With a rich galleon in tow-tow-tow,
  With a rich galleon in tow!"

Johnnie Morgan was leaning against the stern bulwarks, watching the heave and fall of the vessel and listening to the sailor's song. "Hardly to the text, Dan, is it? We are to capture a city and spoil its treasure houses, and have no idea of hitching a line of galleons behind us."

"Sir," replied Dan, "as chief helmsman I know we shall go south to the Azores and follow the Spanish track across the ocean. Ships of King Philip's we must meet, and maybe, at first, we shall bid them a good-morrow and kiss our hands to them. But Dons are Dons, and we are what our forefathers have made us. Ale and beef must fight salt fish and thin Canary. I have cut ox meat, drunk October, and ploughed the deep. I know the effect of all on a man's heart and head. I can drink with a Dutchman and dance with a Frenchman, but, St. George, his sword! steel springs from scabbard at the sight of a Spanish face. 'Tis the breed of us, and nature will out."

"And I am the last man to quarrel with my breeding. Well, we are set forth, and no man can say what may hap ere we see yonder line of cliffs again."

"True," mused Dan; "but if we break not faith with God and our captain, nought will happen for which a true man may grieve."

"Amen to that!" said Johnnie, and he fell to watching the sea once more.

Nothing could have been more propitious than the first part of the voyage. The course was south-west, and for days the wind blew steadily from the east or north-east. A low, misty line to larboard—the line of the French coast—was the last sight of Europe the adventurers had. For fifteen days after this the heaving sea met the whole circle of the gray-blue horizon. The days grew warmer and the winds softer as they voyaged south; the good ship was bearing them into the arms of summer. For some few days there was plenty of bustle aboard. Captain and crew overhauled the stores and stowed them more securely and handily; they critically studied the behaviour of their trim little craft as good seamen should; and the gentlemen adventurers became better acquainted with one another, and

got their sea-legs and sea-stomachs. When the time came that heads and eyes were no longer turned backwards for a glimpse of familiar landmarks, but were strained forward towards the land of their hopes, then those aboard the *Golden Boar* had settled down, each in his own place, to form a happy brotherly community, linked by common hopes, aims, and interests. Sailors, soldiers, and men of gentle breeding fraternized freely together, each prepared to stand by the other in the last extremity of danger, or to share loyally in the fruits of good fortune. Harmony was complete, yet discipline was perfect; for the skipper was worthy of his name, and that name was the glorious one of "Drake."

It was an easy matter in those brave old times to get together an excellent ship's company. Men of all ranks and stations were wild for adventure, and bold sailors literally trod upon one another in their eagerness to be berthed aboard a ship chartered for a voyage to the magic New World. Captain Drake had picked and chosen at his leisure, and a man needed to be many-sided in his accomplishments to get his name inscribed on the ship's books. Take Dan Pengelly. He was an excellent sailor, as bold as a lion, and had sailed the western ocean before. But a hundred men in Plymouth could claim so much as that. Dan's precious packet and his skill as a singer were the deciding points in his favour. A capable band of musicians could be mustered from amongst the crew and the archers. Life aboard the *Golden Boar* was jolly enough, and no man in the whole company wished to be otherwhere. Glorious days! heroic hearts! and happy, happy, land that bred them!

The Azores were readied without accident, almost without incident, and Captain Drake sailed boldly into the harbour of Flores and sent ashore for fresh fruits and water. There were two Spanish vessels in the harbour, one a heavily-armed galleon of about six hundred tons. Like the English ship, she was going westwards, her destination being Vera Cruz, from which port she was to escort a treasure-ship filled with the produce of the Mexican mines. When the English captain heard this he resolved, other things failing him, to bear King Philip's treasure to Europe himself. His company was eager to be away, so a night and a day completed his stay at Flores.

And now for a full month, with varying winds and under changing skies, through storm and shine, the *Golden Boar* ploughed her ocean furrow in the path of the sun; and on the twenty-fourth of May she cast anchor in the bay of San Joseph, Trinidad. West and north of her lay the multitudinous islands of the fertile Indies. Southwards stretched the continuation of the great American

continent, the land of so many dreams and hopes and desires. Johnnie Morgan stood with Master Jeffreys and gazed at the long-sought land—at its waving palms, its gleaming sands, the native huts, and the white houses of the Spaniards. A native boat shot out from the shore. Two dusky, pleasant-faced fellows stepped aboard. Johnnie went forward. He put out his hand and touched them with trembling fingers. Wonderful, new creatures!

Chapter XXXI.

IN THE BAY OF SAN JOSEPH.

The appearance of an English vessel in any harbour of Spanish America was the reverse of pleasing to the Spanish authorities. The Spaniards who commanded in the smaller stations were not of the best type of Castilian chivalry. Soldados of fortune, needy and unscrupulous adventurers, or intriguing favourites of some colonial governor, they had all the greed and arrogance of the noble Dons without their proud reserve and sense of chivalry and honour. In a hurry to get rich, they ground down the hapless natives into the dust. They robbed and ill-treated their timid dependants without fear or remorse, and exacted a cringing obedience that hid smouldering fires of hate and revenge. The Spanish troops were as lawless as their leaders, and black ink would turn red were one to attempt to tell the true tale of Spanish misrule and terrorism in the rich islands of the West. The Don looked upon the poor Indian as a chattel given over to him to do with according to his lordly will, and he usually acted in harmony with the extremest measure of his belief. And therein he differed wholly from those freebooting, audacious, devil-may-care sons of Devon and the west who followed in the Spanish wake across the Western Main. To the English mariner the gentle, heathen Indian was an object of compassion. God had given him a glorious land in which to dwell, and had heaped upon him riches that he could neither appreciate nor value; but in the higher characteristics of manhood, and in the blessings of religious revelation, He had denied him much, and so we find Drake, Hawkins, Raleigh, Gilbert, Oxenham, Whiddon, and a score of other bold captains on all occasions treating the natives with civility and even kindness. The poor, brown-skinned fellows soon learned to know friend from

foe, and everywhere they came forth to welcome the blue-eyed sons of Albion, whilst they ran and hid themselves from the darker-hued children of Spain.

The commandant of San Joseph quickly learned that an English vessel had anchored in the bay, and he resolved to extend no courtesies whatsoever to the unwelcome visitors. On finding that the ship was a small one and without consorts, his resolution to treat her captain with disdain was strengthened. John Drake fired a gun to announce his arrival; the echoes boomed round the bay, but brought no answer from the fort. Another signal was fired, with a similar lack of result. The gunner, a grizzled old veteran, who had been buccaneering with the great admiral, turned to his captain. "Thy brother—God preserve him!—would send an iron messenger with his third salute."

John Drake smiled. "I'll send a gentle one first, Diggory," he said. He called up Master Jeffreys and Nick Johnson. "Which of ye two speaks the better Spanish?"

"I had the longer chance to learn the language," replied Nick, ruefully rubbing the place denuded of an ear; "but Master Timothy doubtless possesses the choicer collection of words."

"Quantity will serve us better than quality, perhaps. But go, both of ye, to the commandant and tell him that Captain Drake of the *Golden Boar* out of Plymouth will wait upon him at sunrise to-morrow. Take a ship's boat with four rowers and four archers, and let the Indians guide you."

A boat was instantly lowered, Nick made the Indians understand what was required of them, and the deputation rowed ashore. Their comrades watched them curiously, and an equally interested group of natives gathered on the shore to await their arrival.

The keel bit into the sand, the two messengers stepped out, and the escort of archers formed up behind them. The rowers pushed the boat back so that it floated easily, then shipped their oars and waited. One of the Indians, proud of his position, strutted importantly at the head of the small procession. (The unfortunate fellow was soundly whipped before nightfall for rendering any assistance to the hated English.) Natives hung about in little groups, but no Spaniard was seen until the gate of the castle was reached. There a sleepy sentinel yawned at them until they had repeated for the third time their request

for an interview with the commandant. That officer was indulging in "siesta" and refused to be disturbed, and the deputation was still on the outer side of the gate. Master Jeffreys lost his patience and his temper. "My message to thy master, fellow, was a civil one," he exclaimed, "and to the effect that Captain Drake of Plymouth, Devon, England, would honour him by waiting upon him at sunrise to-morrow. Now, methinks, Captain Drake will come to him in less ceremonious fashion and without further delay." The irate Devonian turned on his heel and strode off.

And by so doing he missed the gratification of seeing the effect of his words. The name of "Drake" twice repeated acted as a talisman on the slumberous senses of the sentinel. His jaw dropped in sudden terror; he stared for a moment at the retreating figures, and then dashed into the castle at a run.

He burst in upon his drowsy commander.

"Alas, signor, what have we done! The army of the saints preserve us!"

"From what, blockhead?"

"From the archfiend in the flesh. 'Tis Drake that hath sailed into the bay."

The commandant sat and gaped in stupid affright.

"Drake!" shouted the soldier.

He had no need to say more. His officer's chin dropped on to his breast. "We are dead men," he muttered. "Why has he come hither? We have no gold, no treasure-ships. He will burn the place over our heads." The man continued muttering to himself and fingering the buckle of his loosened belt.

The soldier looked through the window. "The Englishmen stand on the beach," he said, "talking with Ayatlan, the chief. There is no movement on the ship; no one signals. The messengers were civil when they came."

"Son of a donkey!" blazed forth the commandant, "why didst not thou say so? Run after them; prevent them from carrying angry faces to the robber who rules them. If I had men—not sheep—under me, I would fight this Drake; I'd rid the world of him, and Pope and king should bless me. But run, run!"

And the soldier ran. Terror lent wings to his heels. One name rang through his brain, and the name was "Drake." He caught Master Timothy just re-embarking his little band. The sight of the Indians restored him to some measure of dignity, and he volubly explained that the Spanish captain had not understood the signer's message. He apologized profusely, and promised that his commandant would make amends for the mistake by paying the great sea-captain a visit as soon as a boat could be made ready.

Nick understood more of the rapidly spoken Spanish than did Jeffreys, and he was satisfied. "There has doubtless been a mistake," he said to his companion. "Probably this knave never carried our message properly. He is scared half out of his wits, and looks like a rogue condemned to be hanged. All's well that ends well. Let us be getting back to the ship with a friendly report."

About an hour later, the commandant, accompanied by an imposing retinue, both Spanish and Indian, rowed out to the *Golden Boar*. Captain Drake and the gentlemen of his company had been to their wardrobes and donned their best, and the visitors by no means carried off the prize for the splendour of their array. As far as physique was concerned the Dons were completely outclassed. Sallow and listless from tropical fevers and loose living, they stood in sharp contrast to the brawny, clear-skinned Englishmen. The difference was obvious even to their own proud eyes, and they felt it.

No sooner were the Spaniards aboard than they fixed their gaze on the group on the upper deck, and one thought prevailed in the minds of all—"Which was the terrible Drake?"

Morgan stood out above his fellows by a good head, but surely he was too young! The commandant had heard that Drake was no giant; he had also heard—and half believed—that he had horns, hoof, and a tail. The puzzle was solved. Captain Drake, short, burly, bearded, black-haired, bull-throated, but blue-eyed, stood forward; his air was unmistakably one of command. Master Jeffreys undertook the duties of master of the ceremonies, and the commanders were introduced to each other and gracefully bowed their acknowledgments of the honour.

The interview was short and formal. The Spaniard welcomed the Englishmen, and hoped that the peace would not be broken. Captain Drake echoed his hopes. The commandant offered presents of fruit, wine, and fresh

meat; the skipper accepted and requited the kindness in suitable fashion. A few flagons of wine were drunk, and the interview ended. The company aboard the *Golden Boar* had no great opinion of their visitors, but the visitors had a better one of them. They had noted the spick and span order on shipboard, the bearing of the men, and they did not forget the name of the captain—they only made the mistake of confounding him with the great admiral, his brother.

Chapter XXXII.

A GLIMPSE OF THE FABLED CITY.

A week went by, and the *Golden Boar* still lay in the bay of San Joseph. Her captain and the Spanish commandant had exchanged many civilities, and the latter was surprised that the fire-eating Drake had committed no deed of violence. He suspected that some deep scheme lay hidden behind all this appearance of friendliness and courtesy. His suspicions were, in a measure, correct; he was wrong only in his idea of the nature of the Englishman's plans. Double guards were set round the fort each night, and the native chief was compelled to sleep within its walls. Morning after morning the Spaniards awoke, surprised to find that the hours of darkness had brought no sudden assault on the fortress. The natives freely visited the ship with fruit, flowers, and meats, and the English sailors spent hours ashore, wandering in the near forests or fraternizing with the natives on the beach. The Spaniards imagined their own midnight extermination was being planned, and therefore was the chieftain compelled to sleep within reach of a Spanish sword, and his subjects were given to understand that the first sound of tumult in the darkness would end Ayatlan's life. The commandant apparently forgot that the great admiral had sacked towns three times the size of San Joseph with a less capable force than the crew of the *Golden Boar*.

Truth to tell, Captain Drake had never once contemplated any attack on San Joseph; he valued the place at less than a scratch on an Englishman's skin. His stay in the harbour was dictated solely by a desire to glean information concerning the Orinoco and the land of gold that he sought. The delta of the great river lay, the nearest land, to the south of the island; the natives professed

to know much of the river and the tribes dwelling on its banks, and they exchanged mysterious nods and signs one with another when "El Dorado" was mentioned.

Presents were liberally bestowed, and promises were scattered broadcast. Dan Pengelly and the two Johnsons, often accompanied by Master Jeffreys and Morgan, spent hours at the doors of native huts, eagerly questioning the Indians, or listening to long, jumbled stories, eked out in a jargon of Spanish and Indian. Almost invariably they came away as wise as they went. The natives either knew nothing of real significance or would not disclose their secrets.

The adventurers grew impatient. They were in no mood to spend day after day idling off a dirty Spanish-Indian settlement. Their thoughts aye fled southwards, and they wanted to spread sail and follow their thoughts. Dan's papers had been read and re-read until many knew them by heart. But they obviously contained little, save rumours and vague indications of locality. What the eager adventurers wanted were definite directions as to route and distances, and also a native guide along the lower reaches of the river. At length both appeared to be forthcoming.

Ayatlan came aboard early one morning and asked for the captain. Ushered into the cabin, where a council was being held, he bowed himself down to the floor, then squatted on a mat and began his story without further prelude.

"My white brother, who has come from the great and good White Mother that rules the rising sun, is growing angry with Ayatlan because he has not told him that which his heart so desires to know."

"My Indian brother has received gifts and made promises; the promises have not been kept. I do right to show anger," replied Drake sharply. "The Spaniards would have flogged Ayatlan, and maybe have killed his sons, for such bad faith and crooked dealing."

The chief bowed. "Spaniards are beasts and the children of beasts. The Englishmen are sons of the Father of Heaven, and Ayatlan prays to them as to his gods. Why has my brother grown soft-hearted to his enemies and mine? The tongue of rumour tells how he has eaten up their armies at a mouthful. Is my brother grown old and toothless?"

John Drake flushed. He had had more than one reminder that the admiral, his

brother, would have acted more energetically than he had done. But the younger man was by nature more cautious and diplomatic. He made answer: "My teeth are sound, Ayatlan, and the fire of manhood is still in my heart. Do not foes sometimes make peace for a while?"

"True; but when one makes peace with them that hate him, he is guilty of folly, for the enemy gathers strength whilst at rest, and waits to strike at an advantage."

"What has all this to do with the thing I seek?"

"Ayatlan has been working for his white brother since the hour when his ship came into the bay. He has thought night and day how he might help him to the desires of his heart."

"Well?"

"Last night a youth from another tribe came into the village with one of my messengers. He knows the great river, and hath journeyed many days on its bosom. He will guide the children of the great White Queen to the city of the 'Gilded One.'"

The quiet announcement thrilled the whole cabin. Here was the end of uncertainty. Drake grasped the chieftain by the hand. "What bargain doth Ayatlan wish to make?" he asked.

"I make no bargain," was the proud rejoinder. "Have I not given my white brothers joy? They will not forget. The guide waits in my boat."

"Let us speak with him."

The chief spoke to one of his attendants, and the guide was brought in. The adventurers looked at him with great curiosity; he was an object of the intensest interest to them. The youth's appearance was not prepossessing. To begin with, he was very dirty; the rags of a Spanish doublet hung about his body; legs and feet were bare, but a battered helmet, several sizes too large, covered his head and came down about his ears; a pair of cunning eyes peeped from under the bent rim of the headpiece, and quickly took in the details of the gathering. The hearts of the adventurers sunk at the first sight of the ludicrous and somewhat sinister personage. So this was the long-sought guide to whom they were to

submit their lives and fortunes! Not one present liked the prospect.

There was a moment's silence. "Tell the zany to uncover," exclaimed the captain. Then he turned to Ayatlan. "Will my brother tell the young man what we want with him, and question him as to his fitness for the duties he offers to fulfil?"

"He will speak for himself. He has been a servant of the Spaniards, and knows their tongue better than I do."

Master Jeffreys took the young Indian in hand, and questioned him pretty closely. He answered glibly enough, with a "Yes" to almost every question. He had been many voyages up the Orinoco.

"How many?"

He held up the fingers of one hand. One voyage had lasted from the first night of the young moon until it was full.

What did he know of the city of gold?

Apparently he knew everything. The city lay on the headwaters of the river under the great mountains. A mighty lake lay at the foot of the city. The sands of the lake were composed of the yellow gold that the signers desired.

Had he met any one who had visited the city?

Yes; an Indian trader. He had once come into the camp of his Spanish masters when they were many days' journey up the great river. His masters had used him as interpreter. The houses of the city were of dazzling white stone, and the roofs of plates of gold. The people bathed in the lake on certain festival days, and afterwards sprinkled themselves so thickly with the precious yellow dust that they looked like golden images. Yes; they had temples, and the gods were of gold, and sacrifices were offered on golden altars. Sparkling stones, such as the signers loved, were found in the waters of the lake.

How far off was the city?

Oh! many moons' journey. No; the inhabitants were not warlike. They would welcome the white strangers from the land of the rising sun, and give them

yellow dust and sparkling stones as much as their hearts desired. Yes; the dangers of the way were great, for many forests and swamps must be passed; roaring waterfalls blocked the passage of the river. The flow of the waters was fierce, the tides strong, and there was a thousand channels to bewilder the voyager. But he knew the way through the maze of waterways.

Could he guide the Englishmen?

He could. He hated the Spaniards, and would never act as guide to those who oppressed his own nation. But the Englishmen were brothers to the Indian.

What reward did he desire?

Clothes like those worn by his white brothers, and a sword to slay his enemies.

Needless to say, a bargain was struck forthwith. The guide clapped on his shapeless headpiece and strutted off, a happy man. He had told not a few lies; indeed, he had agreed with everything the adventurers seemed to desire, and spun them the yarns he had heard from the Spaniards, which tales he knew would gratify his new audience. And well-nigh a score of brave but credulous men shook hands with one another most gleefully, rubbed those same hands in joyous anticipation, and confidently looked forward to fabulous wealth and the glories of the city of marble and gold, the matchless capital of "El Dorado."

Chapter XXXIII.

WANDERING IN A MAZE.

"Land ho!"

The idlers on deck sprang to their feet, and the cabins were speedily emptied of their occupants. All eyes turned southwards. Nothing visible save the horizon, gray with the heat-haze of noon, and the gray-blue waters that heaved up to meet it. But the sailor in the crosstrees could see what was invisible to those on the

deck. The gazers looked at him. He extended his forefinger over their heads.

"Land ho!" he cried again; "leagues of it, stretching east and west!"

The adventurers crowded into the bow of the boat, leaning over the bulwarks to larboard and starboard. Presently a sinuous line, darker gray than the rest of the horizon, could be discerned above the surface of the ocean. It lifted, cleared; the gray deepened to black; the low coast of the Orinoco delta was revealed. The crew raised a resounding cheer, and the gentlemen of the company waved their caps in the air. Yacamo, the guide, stood in the forepeak of the ship, the centre of an eager group. Yonder was land; for what point of it should they steer? Master Jeffreys was endeavouring to settle that question. The Indian was pouring out a torrent of coast Spanish, and gesticulating with every sentence. The Devonian explained the situation to his comrades.

"From what I can gather," he said, "the arms of the river embrace about fifty leagues of coastline similar to that which confronts us. In this stretch there are at least a hundred mouths, connected one with the other by thousands of cross channels. The whole delta is a bewildering maze of waterways. Some of these are deep enough to carry our ship well into the country; others are too shallow to float a ship's boat. Moreover, the guide says that he has had a free passage up a channel on one occasion that was impassable on another because of the shifting sandbanks. One of the main mouths is very deep, but the current is also of great strength. We take risks whatever we do."

"Is he sure that we are approaching the Orinoco coast?"

"Quite."

"That will do, then. We will skirt it until he recognizes a landmark."

The light breeze held steady, the tide was running in; so fair progress was made. The land now stood out quite distinct from the water. Dark masses of woodland could be discerned standing back on the fringe of the tidal mud, but no opening was visible in the low, dark line. Without going farther in, the ship's course was altered until it was parallel with the coast, and all the afternoon they held steadily along, looking for some landmark familiar to the Indian. But the coast was so monotonous in its regularity that distinguishing features were not plentiful. It was nearly sunset when, following an inward curve of the shore, they discovered that they were in the mouth of a wide estuary. The banks were miles

apart, but, the tide being out, a turbid current was distinguishable, flowing in great volume seawards. The wind, for the time, had practically died down, and the current began to swing the ship round, and bear her back to the Atlantic. Soundings were taken, and about three fathoms of water discovered, where at least twenty times that depth had been anticipated. This was disappointing, for it was evident that they had turned into one of the shallow mouths, and navigation might come to an end a few miles up. Captain Drake dropped anchor well away from the shore and its pestilential night mists, and made all snug against the morning. He recognized that the navigation of the river was going to be no easy matter, and he decided to go warily.

The tide ran again about midnight, and on the early morning ebb the *Golden Boar* stood out to sea once more, and went in search of a more promising opening. They found one that Yacamo thought he knew, and, taking advantage of the afternoon tide, they ran up nearly twenty miles. The current was almost as strong as the tide, and they had to anchor against the ebb, or be swept out to sea quicker than they had come in. The next morning they went on again, and were fifty miles up the channel by nightfall. Away to right and left were masses of flat, swampy land, the intersecting waterways reddening and glistening in the setting sun.

The numerous channels and jutting stretches of land so broke the force of the tide that hardly any headway was made the next day, and a council was held to determine methods for further progress.

Captain Drake was of opinion that it was impossible to continue the passage of the river in the ship. Rigorous questioning and cross-questioning of Yacamo brought out further ugly reports of the shifting nature of the river-bed, and of the frequency of shallows. A stay of a couple of days in the anchorage was resolved upon, and during that time exploration by means of boats was to be pushed along vigorously.

But it was easier to decide this matter than to carry the decisions into practice. Three boats were sent out the next day just after sunrise. All pursued a more or less southerly course through the channels, and by noon all three crews had lost themselves in the maze. The waterways were all alike, muddy, tree-bordered, steamy, oppressively malodorous, and swarming with reptiles. Moreover, they laced and interlaced so frequently, crossing like the threads in a woven fabric, that any idea of direction was impossible. The giant trees shut in

the channels from one another, and no boat's crew could see many yards ahead. In the afternoon, gun-fire from the ship gave the voyagers a cue to their whereabouts, and a guide back to safety. The scheme of exploration in order to find a safe passage for the ship had failed.

An anxious day followed. Would the mighty river never yield up its golden secret? Were the adventurers to be baffled and foiled after their thousands of leagues of journeying? The guide declared that the Spaniards had got hundreds of miles farther up the river, but by means of galleys of forty to sixty oars apiece. The *Golden Boar* had no such craft aboard. Three good ships' boats she had, the largest capable of holding about a score of men with arms and provisions, the others with capacity for about half that number. The largest boat was fitted with a mast, and a gun might be mounted in the bow.

No man was in the mind to turn back, and progress by boat was resolved upon. What should be done with the ship? She must not be wholly abandoned, for she was wanted for the voyage home. Some counselled that she should be taken back to Trinidad and harboured there for three months, coming back to the river again at the end of that period. Others were for hiding her, as Oxenham had hidden his ship; but Nick and Ned Johnson were loud against any such proceeding. A plan suggested by Trelawny was to the effect that half the company should go buccaneering amongst the islands in the *Golden Boar*, whilst the other half should try for "El Dorado's" land, the spoils of each expedition to be put into the common fund, and then shared according to the terms of the cruise. A few reckless spirits agreed to this, but Captain Drake would make no such division of his forces. To do so, he argued, would be to weaken both parties to the verge of powerlessnesa.

Matters were at a deadlock. Then Dan Pengelly went hunting, and caught a native canoe and two natives. He brought them to the ship. Yacamo could make himself understood. He persuaded the Indians that his masters were not Spaniards, but tender-hearted white men, who loved the brown man like a brother. Generosity in the matter of presents helped the faith of the two men. They declared their willingness to help the white strangers. Their own village was near at hand, hidden in the wooded recesses of an island, and they had intercourse with other villages along the delta, and could guide the adventurers through the network of channels to the main stream.

But the problem what to do with the ship remained unsolved. The two natives

declared that it was impossible to get her into the main river; and even if that could be done, her voyage up-stream would be short, as waterfalls blocked the passage.

Captain Drake and a small retinue proceeded to the Indian village, and talked with the chief. He proved friendly enough, and quite willing to help, when he found that the newcomers were foes to his oppressors, the Spaniards. He paid a return visit to the ship, and, learning the difficulty concerning her, offered to hide her in a deep pool on the eastern side of his own island. She could there be effectively screened. A survey of the spot and the channels leading to it showed that the plan was feasible; and, with ship's boats and native canoes, the *Golden Boar* was towed to her anchorage, and preparations for the boat journey were at once begun. The vessel was dismasted, her guns buried, and the ammunition safely stowed in an empty hut. Masts and sails were fitted to the two smaller boats, and the chief furnished a large canoe and rowers for the carriage of stores. Two other canoes of stronger make were constructed, and at the end of twelve days Captain Drake had a flotilla of five boats under his command. Sixty men were to form the expeditionary force; one gentleman adventurer, one ship's officer, two soldiers, and two seamen—all chosen by lot—being left behind in the native village in charge of ship and stores.

Chapter XXXIV.

FLOOD AND FEVER.

The Indians were as good as their word. Headed by the chief's canoe, the adventurers passed in steady procession through more than a hundred miles of delta waterways. Progress was slow, for, though the current in the cross channels was not strong, the wind was hardly felt; the heat was stifling, and rest during the midday hours absolutely necessary. Then there were villages to be visited, presents to be made to the chieftains, and feasts to be eaten in return. Haste was impossible, though very desirable. The rains were beginning, the river would soon be in flood, and pestilence would stalk through the swampy regions like a destroying angel.

At last the apex of the delta was reached, and the broad river—stretching miles from bank to bank—lay before the navigators. The milk-white current, laden with chalky washings from the land, swept by in a mighty flood. On its bosom floated trees and detached masses of soil, going northwards to build up the growing delta. But for the wind and the guidance of the natives the adventurers would have made no headway against the mighty volume of the waters. Happily the North-East Trades from the Atlantic, unimpeded by mountain or hill, blew with steady and strong persistence across the flat delta and along the level plains through which the river made its way. Sandbanks in the bed diverted the current here and there, making quiet, lake-like pools under the banks. The Indians knew of these, and skilfully made use of them. Sails were spread to the breeze, and the flotilla went steadily on its way.

One week went by, and then another. The weather grew worse and worse. Terrific storms swept across the plains, lashing the Orinoco into fury, tearing down the mighty trees on its banks, and deluging the intrepid voyagers. The banks of the stream were almost lost; hundreds of square miles of forest-clad plain were under water, the tree-tops alone showing the navigators the true course of the river. The flood flowing sea-wards became thicker, deeper, and mightier than ever. The humid heat of the stormy summer became well-nigh unbearable. Men sickened, and in a few cases died. Camping ground at night was almost unobtainable, and thick, poisonous mists enwreathed the boats during the hours of darkness, fevering the men's blood, cramping and stiffening their limbs. It became imperative to call a halt for a while; the enfeebled rowers made scant progress against the strengthening current, and the success achieved was not worth the effort that was made. A pile-supported village was sighted, and the Indian guides turned their boat thither, the others following.

The village stood on some rising ground on the western bank of the stream, and in the dry season must have been at least half a mile from the margin of the waters. Now the floods rolled between the piles, submerging at least ten feet of them. Native canoes were tethered to the supports, and the house platforms were soon covered with knots of brown-skinned fellows full of anxiety and apprehension concerning the oncoming fleet. They knew the ship's boats for those used by the white men who came trading or raiding along the river, and wondered to find them attempting a voyage at such a time. The friendly Indians went forward and explained who the white men were, and what they wanted, and the villagers proved kind and confiding, as indeed had all the natives dwelling along the river. They gave up room in their huts to the fevered men, sleeping out

on the platforms themselves, and for a few days the expedition rested and recuperated.

The sun had set, the moon was above the tree-tops, steadily making for its zenith. A group of three—Johnnie Morgan, Timothy Jeffreys, and Dan Pengelly—sat on the platform of one of the huts, their legs dangling over the edge within a couple of feet of the water. The day had been fiercely hot, and the water around had steamed like a smoking cauldron. With the moon had come a brisk breeze, that swept the stagnant, mouldy vapours away, and left a clear landscape and cool air. Dan was stuffing tobacco into a pipe of bamboo, and urging the two gentlemen to follow his example, the smoke of the weed being, he declared, an antidote against the malarial poisons breathed out by the foul mud and rotting vegetation that surrounded them. The old sailor had enjoyed marvellously good health throughout the river voyage, and, forgetting his previous travels, and the natural toughness of his constitution, put his happy condition down to his daily pipes of the fragrant Indian weed. But his two companions were too languid for indulgence in smoking. Their heads were giddy, their hearts throbbing, and their stomachs at war with all solid food. The tropical marsh fever had them in its grip, and the grasp was tightening every moment. The trees swayed dismally in the breeze, and the birds chattered querulously at being disturbed. The waters "lap, lapped" monotonously against the piles, and horny-backed alligators nosed amongst them, seeking for scraps and offal or any stray eatables that came their way. Moths and fireflies flitted about in such numbers that the air seemed alive with them. All around was a vast, shallow, fresh-water sea—rolling, heaving, sucking, lapping, shimmering under the tropical moon. A night full of majesty, beauty, mystery, and death.

Dan curled himself comfortably against a pillar, closed his eyes, and smoked with keen enjoyment. Morgan and Jeffreys gazed for a while with aching eyes at the weird scene around; then the heavy lids dropped, and they fell a-dreaming.

Johnnie was back in the cool forest by Severn side; the oaks and the beeches swayed above him, and the bracken rustled as a rabbit scuttled through. The nightingale was singing his love song to his mate and the moon, and the dull, far-off roar of the rushing tide sounded a low accompaniment to the song. Gone were the white, warm, mud-laden waters, the floating trunks, the screaming parrots, the croaking frogs, the howling beasts; the glare of the sun no longer

hurt his eyes, and its fierce heat no longer sent his brain throbbing and burning. The air was cool, the bracken sweet, and the bird trilled out its passionate music. Why should he sit uncomfortably propped against a tree? He would lie down, and let the fresh, green fronds curl above him. He sighed, his limbs relaxed, he swayed—he fell with a heavy splash into the warm, lapping waters!

A nosing alligator swished his tail against a pile and darted off in sudden alarm; but he came round again speedily, just as the half-fainting man roused sufficiently to be conscious that he was in the water. Jeffreys was asleep, but Dan's sailor senses were alert in an instant. His eyes opened, he glanced around, missed Morgan, and peered over into the flood. The fallen man cried out, and the huge reptile that had espied him moved off again. Dan saw both, shouted in alarm, and hurled a handy log at the prowling horror; then he swung himself, monkey fashion, down a stout pile, seized Morgan by the hair, and brought him so that he got a grip of the platform. A minute later Johnnie swung himself into safety, and only just in time, for more than one scaly reptile had scented the feast, and was hurrying through the moonlit waters, eager and voracious. This unlucky sousing in the flood settled the grip of the fever on Morgan. When next he sunned himself on the platform the waters had subsided, the mud was baked and cracking, and the major portion of the expedition leagues away southwards.

Chapter XXXV.

A FOE.

Johnnie Morgan was not the only sick man left behind in the Indian village. Master Jeffreys had had the strong hand of the fever upon him; and the son of the parson of Newnham, like his neighbour and friend the Blakeney yeoman, found the air of the Orinoco less invigorating than the air of the Severn. With the three sick men had been left three sound men as guard and escort. Two of these, the Johnsons, had elected to remain with their friend Master Timothy, and a soldier had been chosen to keep them company. Johnnie was the last of the three invalids to recover; indeed, the others had made plans for their journey in the wake of the main expedition long before he was fit to take his place in the boat.

It was fortunate for the six left behind that all, save one, were experienced navigators, and that two of these had had the opportunity of sailing boats on the Severn, the most treacherous of all English tidal rivers. The boat built after the fashion of a native canoe was left for them; they rigged a mast and small sail, fixed a rudder, and, with a native of the village as guide, set off a little after sunrise one morning.

For many days the voyage was uneventful enough. Captain Drake had gone before, and the natives were everywhere eager to welcome the Englishmen and render them every assistance. They were warned of dangers in the river, which still ran strongly, and was in places a couple of miles in width. Guides were readily provided, and everything done to hasten them on their way. Their light boat went splendidly; they were spared many of the ceremonious visitations that had fallen upon their captain, and often, during the day, made two miles of progress to one made by him over the same stretch of river. Each sunset found them nearer and nearer to the main body, and they were quick to notice that the latter were going slower and slower every day.

The country was no longer monotonously flat, as it had been whilst the river swept along through the llanos. Hills now rose up to right and left; great mountains loomed up dimly against the skyline; and the low, muddy banks gave way to towering limestone cliffs, their natural whiteness hidden by the luxuriant, clinging vegetation. Shallows in the river were no longer sandy and sluggish, but rapids were the dangers to navigation. The air was cooler and fresher, the vegetation was that of drier soil and drier atmosphere, insect life was less noxious, and the labours of the way grew more endurable.

But as the perils from nature decreased, those to be apprehended from man increased. The adventurers had long passed the most southerly point of Spanish influence. Hitherto they had found docile Indians, who had learned to fear the white man and his strange weapons, and to hate one section of the white race—namely, the Spanish. The Englishmen were white, and possessed the moral power of the race over ruder peoples; they also came as foes and rivals to those who ill-treated the long-suffering native; hence they had been everywhere treated with awe, not unmixed with real affection. As far as the inhabitants of the land were concerned, their voyage had been a sort of triumphal procession.

But inhabitants of hilly or mountainous land are always hardier and less docile than their brethren of the fat plains. The Indians on the hilly fringes of the

Orinoco basin were no exception to this rule. They had heard of the white man; refugees from the lower lands had spread reports of his rapacity and cruelty, and of the scorn with which he treated the poor brown man. They were resolved that he should not lay hands on them or their treasures without a struggle. And so it came to pass that one day the messengers of Captain Drake returned to him with reports of a very rough reception from a native dignitary.

Although annoyed by this rebuff, the adventurers attached but little importance to it. Perhaps the native messenger had been clumsy over his diplomatic dealings; maybe the hill chieftain had misunderstood him: a second mission should be sent with suitable presents. Accordingly, two of the gentlemen of the company, attended by half a dozen soldiers and as many natives, left the camp on the river-bank and threaded the steeply-pitched woods to the native village. An Indian scout was thrown out in front, on the flanks, and in the rear, and the white men kept solidly together in the centre.

They met with no opposition by the way, and in due time came out of the trees and found themselves on a plateau about a mile square. On the farther edge of this stood a cluster of stone-built huts, evidently surrounded by a rude but effective wall. Before them stretched fields of Indian corn, tall and green after the heavy rains. The evidences of native civilization were greater than any the adventurers had hitherto met. They halted for a brief consultation, then went forward again, resolved to do their errand discreetly and warily. Not one inhabitant was in sight, but, as the wall was neared, slim, brown figures were espied slipping through the waving grain towards the gate.

A close view of the wall showed that the village was a fortress as well as a place of habitation. The stones were rough from the hillside, and quite untrimmed, but patience in selection and arrangement had produced a compact rampart that could not easily be shattered or stormed. The gate was of wood, and towered some feet above the top of the wall. It was shut.

Sir John Trelawny was in command of the embassy, and he directed one of the soldiers to go forward and sound a summons on his bugle. The man did so. The musical notes rang back in double echoes from the hills, and brought a hundred dark heads above the ramparts. Again the soldier sent the sweet echoes flying. The strange notes had their effect on the villagers, for a man came from the gate to the strangers and asked their business. The Indian interpreter, who had been carefully schooled on his way up, and who, moreover, was proud of the

trust reposed in him by the formidable white men, gave a dignified and courteous answer. The white men were, he explained, creatures of another world, a world that lay beneath the rising sun; the sun was their father, and his glory was in his children's faces. They held the thunder and lightning in the hollow of their hands, and could slay men almost at a nod. Yet by nature they were kindly and generous, wishing harm to none. They were passing down the river to a city of gold of which they had heard; during the weeks of their voyage they had not laid an unkindly hand on any man, nor appropriated any man's goods. His own people, and all the tribes along the river, loved and reverenced their white brothers, and would die for them.

The villager listened gravely enough, then swung round towards the gate, saying he would carry the message to his chief faithfully and without alteration. At the end of about half an hour he reappeared. His chief would not see the white men, nor provide them with anything. He had heard that the children of the sun were cruel and rapacious, murdering and burning without mercy if they thought that thereby they might get any of the yellow metal their souls lusted after so strongly.

The interpreter replied that this was true of one section of white men, but his brothers were the enemies of those monsters, warring with them whenever they met them. His brothers were the lordly eagles, and were called "English;" the others were the voracious birds that stalked in the mud, feeding on garbage; the chief had heard of these last, the "Spaniards."'

The villager went away again, but returned quickly with his message unaltered; the chief would not trust the strangers. It was useless to ask him for guides to any city of gold, or to the shores of any lake such as the white men desired. He had never heard of these places, and did not believe they existed. The whole story was a trick to get the country out of the hands of its inhabitants. The trick had worked in the plains where the men had the hearts and brains of sick women; it would not succeed with the "Brown Eagles" of the hills. Let the "White Eagles" from the sun try their strength and wit against them if they so desired.

This answer was uncompromising enough, and with it the messengers went back again to the river. They had looked only into the face of one man of a tribe of a thousand hillmen.

There was a long council round the camp fire that night, and for the first time for some weeks sentinels were set, and keen watch and ward kept until daybreak. A further consultation was held in the morning, after each man had slept upon the suggestions of the previous evening. It was not easy to decide upon a course of conduct. Hitherto the adventurers had pursued their way in peace, and they were anxious to avoid hostilities with the natives. They saw that nothing could be gained by fighting the Indians. They were but a small company in a strange land, and a thousand miles and more from the sea; their object was gold, not conquest. Should they go on their way, leaving the unfriendly chief in the security of his fastness? By so doing would they be leaving an enemy in their rear? On the other hand, should they bring him to his knees, and teach him to respect and fear the name of England? How would their line of conduct operate on the minds of the natives? The point was a delicate one. Some were for pushing ahead, reaching their goal, and dealing with the hill village on their return; others were hot to chastise the stubborn Indian at once, and break the back of native opposition at a blow. Such was the Spanish method, and no man could say that the Dons had not gotten wealth enough.

The latter council prevailed, and it was decided to attack the native stronghold that very night under cover of the darkness. The solitary cannon was taken out of the largest boat and fitted with slings, so that the Indian allies might carry it. Arquebuses were diligently cleaned, and all arms and armour attended to.

The forenoon passed busily enough. During the hot hours the men slept beneath the trees. An hour before sunset supper was served out, and whilst the men were eating it, a boat shot round the bend, and a loud "Halloo!" announced the arrival of Morgan and his companions. This unexpected addition to the fighting strength was heartily welcomed.

Chapter XXXVI.

THE ATTACK ON THE VILLAGE.

Forty Englishmen, with Indian carriers and scouts, stole out from the river-

side camp under the clear light of the tropical stars. The villagers on the hills slept in a false security. Spies had hung about the river all day; but the preparations had no meaning for them, except that they probably signalized an early departure. They had witnessed the arrival of the other boat, and had sped to their chieftain with the news. But the idea of a night attack on their stronghold never occurred to them. This newest type of white man, they had been told and really believed, fought with their own kind only. The Indians shut and barred their great gate, curled themselves up on couch of skins or reed matting, and fell into the deep sleep of the tired savage.

The friendly scouts had so learned every turn and obstacle in the upward path from the river that they could have walked it in the blackest darkness, and the metallic light from the clear heavens was more than sufficient for the keen-eyed mariners. One torch was carried for the firing of the big gun and for the lighting of the matches of the arquebusiers, but its yellow glare was shrouded in a soldier's helmet.

The strip of forest was passed, and the men filed out on the plateau. A breeze from the neighbouring heights stirred the green patches of corn. A scout came back, and whispered that the way was clear. The band moved forward.

The dull, gray mass of the village loomed dimly ahead. No light was visible, but a thin column of smoke from the communal fire rose above the walls and bent away before the wind.

The adventurers were within gunshot of the gate. The big gun was silently fitted to its carriage, loaded and shotted; and the native allies ran back into the corn and hid themselves, quaking with terror.

There was a flash of red flame, a loud roar that came back in echoing thunder from the hills, the crash of the iron ball against the gate. The villagers started from sleep, and looked around in dismay. Another flash, another roar, another crash, a pealing of strange thunder. Then a shout in a strange tongue: "For England! Mother England!" The children of the sun, the wielders of the thunder and lightning, were through the broken gate.

Then arose a mad stampede of terror. The arquebusiers were within the rampart, and death-fire and nauseous smoke spurted from a dozen different places. With squeals and shrieks, as from a mob of terrified brutes, men, women,

and children dashed for the walls and the farther outlets in mad flight for the hills.

"Make for the chief's house. Kill no man unless he opposes you," was the order; and a shouting band soon surrounded the great house in the centre of the village. Some fired the thatched roofs, and a red glare shot up to the blue sky. The cries and screams of the scurrying tribe grew fainter and fainter. But the sturdy headman was not with them. Spear in hand, and alone, he faced his terrible foes, eyes and teeth fiercely gleaming—a bronze Hector. He lunged at the foremost man, and Master Jeffreys knocked him down with the flat of his sword. Instantly Morgan and three or four others threw themselves upon him. He writhed and twisted like a limbed snake, and bit and tore with teeth and hands. But the odds were hopelessly against him; a rope in a sailor's practised hands wound about his body, and he lay, a panting prisoner, across his own threshold. A few others of the villagers were seized, the rest of the roofs were fired, and the adventurers marched back to the river. No spoil was taken.

The odds were hopelessly against him.
The odds were hopelessly against him.

The next morning the rank and file of the prisoners were set at liberty. A present was given to each one, and it was impressed upon them that the white strangers bore them no ill-will, and would not again molest the village if its inhabitants conducted themselves with due deference and friendliness. They had punished them for their churlishness and disrespect, and had no thought of doing them further mischief if they profited by the lesson given them. The men departed, astonished at the clemency shown them.

During the day the major portion of the villagers came back from the mountains and woods, and set stolidly to work repairing their homes. One of the released prisoners ventured to come down to the white men and beg permission to cut rushes for the rethatching of his dwelling. He was quickly told that the river and its rushes were as free to him as ever they had been; and some of the adventurers cut rushes themselves, and told the fellow to let the people know that a supply awaited them.

These wise measures went far to conciliate the natives. They had learned that they must not oppose the strangers, but they also were fairly assured that the white men were not the robbers and destroyers that rumour had represented them to be. Some of them came freely enough into the camp, bartering produce for gaudy trinkets; but, to the intense disappointment of the company, none seemed to know anything about the "Gilded One" or the marvellous city in which he dwelt.

The expedition moved on—rapids, rocks, gorges, and waterfalls impeding the way. The heat was intense; and when at times long marches were necessary, in order to avoid obstacles in the river, the labour of tugging the boats was alike heartbreaking and limb-breaking. More than once the wisdom of leaving the river and marching overland was discussed. But the river was at least a sure path, according to all reports. It led to Lake Parimé and its golden sands and wondrous city. The men grew feverish and unbalanced with anxiety and disappointed hopes. Night after night they were to be found in groups, listening to Yacamo or the Indians from the delta as they retold for the thousandth time the story of "El Dorado;" others would sit beside Master Jeffreys whilst he read and translated Dan's papers; and any words that fell from the Johnsons, and others who had sailed the Spanish Main before, and heard the Spanish stories of fabulous Indian

treasures, were stored up as precious oracles.

And yet the mysterious region never seemed to come nearer; rather it receded as the adventurers advanced, a yellow will-o'-the-wisp that had led them through tangled forest and pestilential swamp only to mock them in the end. The natives grew fiercer and more threatening; the guides began to murmur at the length of the way—their river homes seemed so far behind them. Savage faces peered out from bush and rock upon the company of wearied, ragged, dispirited men. One soldier went mad, raved of gold and jewels, and jumped into a whirlpool to seek both. Two others—one a Cornish squire who had sold his little all to join the expedition—were stricken by the sun, and dropped dead as they were pulling at the boat ropes. A jaguar pounced upon another man as he stooped to get water from a stream. An Indian arrow found the heart of another. The sun, fatigue, fevers, bruises, and the endless racking of limbs and brains, reduced the spirits and strength of the men. They became gaunt, hollow-eyed, tattered, unshorn, uncombed, unkempt, yet they toiled on, silent—save when they cursed and railed at fate—dogged, fiercely purposeful, resolved to die rather than turn back. Song and jest were rarely heard in any boat; haggard fellows tugged at the oars, or lay dreamily watching the sail as it filled with the welcome breeze. Their patience being sapped by disappointment and privation, they were no longer the kindly "white brother" to the Indians; they estranged their friends and made foes at every halting-place.

One man saw this. Since the attack on the hill village the chief of that place had been dragged along with the expedition by way of punishment. Sullenly he had tugged at his oar, carried his load, or pulled at his rope; he neither forgot anything nor forgave anything. He rarely spoke to the Indians from the delta and the plain, and when he did his words were full of contempt. One night, when the adventurers were lodged on the land in a cleft of the mountains, he disappeared. The natives who slept on either side of him as guard were both stabbed to the heart. The sight still further dulled the spirits of all.

Chapter XXXVII.

COUNCIL FIRES IN TWO PLACES.

The rising sun flashed spears of light on a rocky spur that stretched out from the foot of the mighty Andes. A tall, straight figure stood silhouetted against a background of sun-bathed cliff. Higher above him the great masses of land rolled back, league after league, and stretched upwards foot after foot to the eternal snows and the eternal heavens. Below him a belt of dark forest swept round the foothills of the giant range, and through a gap in the mass of trees a noisy, turbid stream went tumbling down to the sweltering plains and a feeder of the Orinoco.

The man stood motionless as his rocky pedestal, and intently watching something beyond the line of trees. Presently he turned sharply about, came down from the crag, pushed his way through the trees, and stood in a little pool-filled hollow. Almost immediately he was joined by about twoscore men, all armed with spear and bow and arrow, and, like himself, brown-skinned and stalwart. The newcomers bowed themselves to the ground and murmured some words of homage and adulation. The standing savage drew in a deep breath, expanding his broad chest, and his eyes flashed with pride and power.

"Arise, my sons," he said; "the gods that make men and unmake them shall reward you. Ye have been faithful to him whom the gods have set over you. To the brave shall be the spoils; my sons shall lade themselves with all their hearts may desire. Now tell me what you have done."

A tall warrior stood forth. "We have followed our father since the white strangers seized him. We have watched him and them, and waited for this happy moment."

"Aught else?"

"We have spoken with the peoples who dwell in the woods and the hills, and turned their minds against the men from the land of the sun-rising. They will fight them if any man can discover a charm that will protect them from the thunder and lightning that springs from the strangers' hands."

The chieftain laughed. "I will find them a charm," he cried. "I have walked all night," he added suddenly; "I will sleep. Watch ye."

The chieftain slept. One man went to the cliff as sentinel; the rest squatted around the pool, looked to their weapons, and talked in whispers. The sun climbed upwards, the shadows shortened, the water of the pool grew warm, the sentinel ensconced himself in a shaded cleft of the rock that overlooked the

valley, and maintained the unwinking watch of the stoic savage.

The chieftain awoke, a giant refreshed. A warrior brought him water in a gourd; another handed him some fruits from a wallet. A call blown on a hollow reed brought the watcher down from his eyrie. Led by the tall warrior who had addressed his chief, the band went off deeper and higher into the hills. They toiled along through a defile all the afternoon, and when the sun was dipping behind the western peaks came into a broad, cup-like valley, that was dotted with the rude stone huts of a mountain tribe. The tall warrior went forward alone, but presently came back and piloted the band through the straggling groups of huts to the spot where the tribal fire was licking up a fresh supply of fuel. A group of warriors seated by the fire gave the newcomers a guttural greeting, and motioned them to seats on the other side of the blazing heap. Silence was maintained until roasted meat, corn cakes, and fermented liquor were handed round to both parties; then all gathered on the windward side, and the palaver commenced.

The visiting chief held forth at great length. He gave a reasonably good summary of the history of the white man along the Orinoco valley from the first advent of the Spaniards. He spoke of their cruelties, their lust for the yellow dust, and their belief in a golden city on the shores of a lake that fed the head waters of the river. He described the attack on his village, and his own subsequent captivity and semi-slavery. He belittled the strength of his captors, and was inclined to scoff at their thunder-and-lightning tubes. He confessed that the flame and roar of these formidable weapons were terrifying at first; but he had witnessed their action at close quarters, and familiarity had bred a sort of contempt. The lightning would not always leap forth when wanted, nor did the thunder always slay. He was inclined to put as much faith in a well-directed arrow. The latter might be discharged unseen; not so the fire-weapons of the white strangers. The fire-god must be brought to their nostrils, and breathe into them before the fire within would answer; and if a man lay on the ground when he saw the fire he was safe from death. Finally, he urged with savage passion that the intruders should be killed or expelled from the land. He spoke of them as wearied and dispirited, sick with fatigue and the sun-fever, and boldly asserted that they were an easy prey. The tall warrior arose after his chief, emphasizing all that his lord had said.

The chiefs of the tribe did not reply at once, but held a brief consultation apart. They were not inclined to accept the white men at their visitor's valuation, nor were they prepared to take up arms against such wonderful beings without

very serious cause. From the chief's own showing they had treated him in a brotherly spirit at first. Other native tribes had, apparently, fraternized with the strangers, and had got considerable advantage thereby. As regards the city of gold, the chiefs had never heard of the place themselves, although they had occasional dealings with peoples who dwelt near the head waters of the great river. But the white strangers were wise, and knew things that the gods had not told to other men. Maybe the city really existed. If the white men wanted to get there, why should any man hinder them? And it was all very well for their visitor to pretend that he had no fear of the thunder weapons. Why had all his people fled at the sound of them?

The chieftain tried to explain, and again urged his points with a number of fresh arguments. But the council was against him; they refused to run their heads into unknown and fearful dangers by opposing a wonderful race that showed no disposition to interfere with them. And so the council ended.

From the cliff that guarded the outlet from the small valley into the gorge a keen-eyed native, gazing intently eastwards towards the greater valley, might have made out a point of yellow light about three leagues away in a bee-line. The light was on the bank of the affluent of the Orinoco, and came from the camp fire of the adventurers. There also a council was being held, and the question for decision was the momentous one whether the quest for the golden city should be abandoned as hopeless. According to the Spanish papers and general rumour the expedition should now be in touch with superior, light-coloured races, and a civilization rivalling that of the ancient empires of Assyria or Babylon for wealth and luxury. The way to Manoa should be as plain and well-known as the way to Rome or Venice. Yet all around were frowning mountains and dense forests, the homes of fierce birds and beasts, and the haunts of savage, warlike tribes. A thousand miles nearer the ocean the natives talked glibly and circumstantially enough about the "Gilded One" and his wonderful city. Here, where the gates of his kingdom should be, no man had heard either of king or country. Months of hardship and privation, the facing of death a hundred times in almost as many forms, had brought the intrepid band to—nothing!

On this particular occasion every man was admitted to the council, and the words of the common soldier and sailor were listened to as attentively as the words of any of the gentlemen. An onlooker would have been sorely puzzled to decide from outward appearance which of the battered, travel-worn band was its leader. The fire lighted up a ring of gaunt, brown, bearded faces, and the pairs of

eyes that centred on each speaker's face in turn had little of hope or animation in them. The conference began after the evening meal, and extended far into the night. All seemed to realize the hopelessness of pursuing the quest any farther, yet none cared to face the ordeal of turning the boats seaward again. They compromised the matter. A last attempt should be made to acquire guides and information. If the attempt failed, the search would be abandoned.

Chapter XXXVIII.

THE WAY BACK.

Yacamo, out searching for signs of human occupation, came upon the entrance to the upland valley, and espied the Indian town. He went back to the camp and reported. A deputation was sent to wait upon the chief; a body of men met them in the pass, and refused to allow them to proceed a step farther. Then some of the adventurers themselves climbed through the gorge, and were met with a shower of arrows that wounded three of them. Finally, Captain Drake himself, under the guidance of Yacamo, worked his way into the valley, and reconnoitred. He calculated the town at a strength of about fifteen hundred to two thousand warriors. It was not fortified; but no force could get up the gorge if reasonable opposition were offered. His own band could be ambushed in a score of places. He decided it was impossible to attack the place with any chance of success.

Scouting parties were sent farther along the river. In every case they were assailed. The Englishmen themselves were shot at again and again if they ventured out hunting, and at night arrows dropped at intervals into the camp. The adventurers were in a hornets' nest, and the hornets were always stinging. These attacks, which argued the existence of a host of enemies, were all the work of the escaped chieftain and his twoscore of followers. Divided into about half a dozen bands, hiding themselves with perfect native cunning, they were as effective as ten times the number of less active, less revengeful foes might be; and they grew bolder every hour.

Despairing of success—wearied, wounded, harassed, sick—the adventurers

resolved to turn back. Since they had entered the hilly country, they had lost seven men; and as the whole country seemed rising to oppose them, it was madness to attempt to force a passage along the rocky, unknown way. With heavy hearts they paddled into the main stream, got into the current, and drifted northwards towards the ocean.

For days there was hardly any attempt at rowing. The strong rush of the chalky waters swept the boats along. Awnings were erected to shut off the terrific heat of the equatorial sun, and the men lay and dozed and rested, their native allies directing the course of the voyage. No foes appeared, days and nights were quiet and uneventful, and the strength and spirits of all began to revive. They had failed in their quest. What of that? The summer was not yet gone. There were Spanish galleons to be attacked. The Johnsons could show where Oxenham had hidden his treasure; and if they had not found Lake Parimé and its city of gold, they had explored much new and wondrously fertile country. The passion for exploration and the gaining of knowledge of new lands was almost as strong in the hearts of the bold fellows as was the thirst for treasure. Third day down the river Dan sang his song again; 'twas,—

> "Ho! for the Spanish Main,
> And ha! for the Spanish gold!"

King Philip's ships were the true and sure gold-mines. All eyes looked and all hearts yearned for the sea. Their thoughts flew to their bonny little ship. Was she safe? How that question agitated every one, and what intense speculation there was as to the way the question would be answered!

If the way back was easier than the journey forward, it was not less dangerous. The heat had increased, insect life had multiplied a myriad-fold, and the pestilential vapours from the swampy lowlands were thicker and deadlier than before; and the men were not fresh from the invigorating sea, but were spent and worn with a thousand hardships. They drooped, sickened, raved in delirium, and in some cases died. Even the cheery Dan succumbed to the poison of the noisome night mists, and whilst the fever was on him his songs and jests were sorely missed. Morgan and some of the others began to sing songs of home, but these the captain stopped because of the depression they induced in some of the men.

At length, after more than a fortnight of drifting with the current, the first parting of the ways at the beginning of the delta was reached. To the Indians this was the threshold of home; to the Englishmen it was but a poor halting-place, from which they must set out to face fresh perils, and maybe meet newer disappointments. The bewildering maze of channels was once more threaded, this time with the varying strengths of the current to indicate the better routes. The dense, overhanging vegetation sheltered the voyagers by day and stifled them by night. Rests at friendly villages were eagerly welcomed, and no bad news awaited the weary band. A few Spanish boats had been seen in some of the channels, but they had asked no questions concerning the Englishmen, and the natives had given no information, fearing that their masters—for so the Dons accounted themselves—would punish them for having assisted their enemies.

It was in the heat of sultry afternoon, the air stirless, the water in the channel warm and rank-smelling. The boats were drifting lazily under the banks, the native steersmen half sleeping at their posts, the white men stretched out, listless, sun-wearied, inert. A canoe shot out across the path of the boats, disappeared along another waterway, stopped, and a Spaniard got out and plunged into the trees on the low island. He watched the flotilla go by. He noticed the attitude of the men.

"St. James!" he cried, "I could do it with a score of resolute soldiers! What a chance! And I must miss it!"

The Englishmen drifted on; the Spaniard followed at a safe distance. He wanted a solution to an important question: Where was the English ship? He had hunted for it, and so had others—for the *Golden Boar* had been tracked from Trinidad into the delta—but no man had sighted her, and knew not how far she had gone up-stream. It was not suspected that she had remained so near the sea as proved to be the case. The native chief had guarded his secret well.

That night, about an hour after sunset, and with the light of the growing moon to guide them, the adventurers tied up their boats in the pool where the *Golden Boar* still lay. What a thrill went through each heart as the outline of their ocean home appeared dimly through the veil of white mist! Tears stood in their eyes, and more than one bold fellow had hard work to choke back a sob. The men left behind came running forth to meet them, all alive, all well. Rough, bearded lips pressed against thin, tanned cheeks in brotherly kisses, and the natives thronged round, full of affectionate and admiring welcome. The brave "white brothers"

were back, and their simple hearts rejoiced.

The villagers began instant preparations for a great feast. Captain Drake marshalled his men, and went aboard his ship. Standing bareheaded on his deck, the flag of England unfurled above him, he returned thanks to Almighty God for a great deliverance from many perils; and the company responded with a sonorous and devout "Amen!" There was no word of repining, no lamentation over the failure that had attended their quest. The dead were remembered in a few moments of bowed and silent reverence, and, at the command of his captain, Morgan sang the "*De Profundis*." "Out of the deep," indeed, had they called, and they thanked God in that He heard them.

Then they went to the place of feasting, and ate as hungry voyagers should eat. After that they slept the deep sleep of wearied men who, after many toils and vicissitudes, had reached a haven where they could rest.

Days of bustle followed. The ship was cleaned of the vegetable growths that clung to her sides; masts were refixed, fittings tested and replaced, and ample stores put aboard. The salt breeze had got again into the men's nostrils, and their hearts cried out for the open sea. Affectionate farewell was taken of their kindly hosts; a promise to come back again was given. Then a flotilla of canoes towed the stout ship into the main channel!

Chapter XXXIX.

JOHN OXENHAM'S CREEK.

More than two months after she had quitted the harbour of San Joseph, the *Golden Boar* dropped anchor in its waters again. She was not expected, and some folks were hoping that she had gone to the bottom of the Atlantic, or was lying rotting in some pestilential mouth of the Orinoco. Yacamo was put ashore, and a brief visit paid to the governor and the chief Ayatlan. The latter was pleased enough to see the Englishmen, and he warned them that mischief was brewing.

"There has been much coming and going of Spaniards and Spanish ships," he said; "and one man has offered great rewards to any that could tell him where you were hidden."

The visit to the governor nearly led to a quarrel. That dignitary was by no means so deferential as on the previous visit; indeed, he was barely civil. Many things had happened during the previous weeks. A ship had arrived from Spain, and she carried an important passenger—to wit, Brother Basil. He was weeks behind the *Golden Boar*, but he soon made up for lost time. In the first place he was able to prove that Captain John Drake of the *Golden Boar* was not the redoubtable Captain Francis Drake so dreaded all along the shores of the Spanish Main. This largely accounted for the altered demeanour of the governor. Rightly guessing that the English ship would put into the harbour if she ever returned from the Orinoco, Basil had at first tried to prepare a warm reception for her. He failed in this, for soldiers were not easy to obtain, the governor was not anxious for a fight, and the very name "Drake" still inspired terror whether it was prefixed by Francis or John. As a second resource he had sent boats into the delta in the hope of locating the ship or her company, and stirring up the natives against the Englishmen. His messengers searched the wrong mouths and channels, and it was only at the last that one of them happed upon the foe; and he was still on the mainland and had sent no tidings.

But the Jesuit, being cognizant of all the plans of the adventurers, and knowing that the Johnsons would lead the way to the scene of Oxenham's defeat and death, prepared yet a third scheme, and, deeming this the surer one, was giving it his personal supervision. He calculated correctly.

When Captain Drake and his retinue were leaving the castle, a native youth who waited upon the soldiers slipped a packet into the hands of the last man, with a whispered injunction to secrecy. The soldier handed the papers to the captain as soon as he was aboard again. A few minutes later Nick and Ned Johnson were sent for into the cabin. The first question caused each one to prick up his single ear pretty sharply.

"Were you the only ones who escaped death when Captain Oxenham was slain?"

"No, some boys were spared."

"Have they ever reached England?"

"As far as we know, no. The priests told us that some of them abjured their faith and had received pardon."

Captain Drake passed some papers across the table. "Look at this drawing."

The brothers did so, and looked at one another pretty shrewdly also.

"What do you make out of it?"

"'Tis a guide to the buried spoil."

The skipper read a rough, explanatory scrawl from the back of the paper. It purported to have been written by one of the lads who had been in San Joseph on a Spanish ship since the departure of the *Golden Boar*. He explained that he wished his countrymen to know that the treasure had never been found by the Dons, and added that he had bribed the native to give the paper to them if they came back. He would not affix his name, because he was ashamed of his weakness in renouncing his faith and nationality.

The tale was plausible enough and cunningly set forth. Less credulous men than the eager adventurers would have been deceived by it. The English was rough, homely, ill-spelt, and unscholarly, and might well have been written by one of the lads. One thing was certain—it could not have been written by a Spaniard. It was written, indeed, by the renegade Basil.

Needless to say the bait was swallowed. The *Golden Boar* made a hurried departure from San Joseph, and went westwards along the coast towards the Isthmus of Panama. Basil had gone thither in a Spanish galleon some twelve days before, and was already ashore awaiting them, and daily expecting a strong body of troops from Panama itself. The adventurers, hopes renewed, were putting on all sail to enter a cunningly laid trap.

Apparently fortune was going to favour them at last. Less than a day's sail from Trinidad they sighted a Spanish ship. They had vowed war against everything Spanish, and were resolved not to go home with an empty hold. The helm was put about, and they bore down on their prey. The vessel was not a large one, but it was well manned. To the order to strike his flag, the captain replied with a well-directed shot. The vessels closed. A sharp fight ensued, and

the adventurers won. The prize was a good one, and the bold band, deeming their enterprise a high and honourable one, loudly thanked God for His goodness. Then they sailed on, eager for fresh conquests.

Even the least hopeful man cast away his doubts and fears. Hitherto they had searched for what no man had found; now they were going for a treasure whose position was definitely set forth, and, moreover, they were on the beaten track where so many of their daring fellow-countrymen had found fortune. Spanish ships they must meet; and when they met them, well, there was but one thing to do—they must capture them. To their reawakened spirits the matter was the plainest of plain sailing. And the glorious sea, too, had washed the fever from them; they were grown strong and hearty once more. The singers sang, the fiddlers played, and Master Jeffreys, Nick and Ned Johnson told their tales afresh. The generous fellows remembered the brave lives that had been sacrificed to gain the treasure they were going to carry off so easily. As far as the memory of the survivors would allow, a list of Oxenham's crew was drawn up; their homes, where known, were placed against their names, and it was resolved that half of what they recovered should go to the relatives of the dead men. Not one man murmured against the decision; it seemed to them the right and proper thing to do: there were no craven or selfish hearts aboard the *Golden Boar*.

And so the eager days sped on. No more possible prizes were sighted, and the time came when keen eyes no longer looked seawards at all. The ship was hugging the shore, and Nick Johnson or his brother spent hours at the masthead searching for a familiar landmark. More than once was the anchor dropped, and a boat sent up a promising creek in the hope that it would prove the long-sought one. Failure after failure was reported, but the search only grew the keener. The adventurers were determined to beat every mile of the coast if necessary. At length came the joyous forenoon when Nick gave a frantic hurrah from his lofty perch. Ho had sighted the bare bluff, the wooded background, and the narrow, winding inlet. His brother was quickly beside him, and almost immediately shouted his reassuring opinion to the expectant company. The goal was reached at last!

There was no need to send an exploring boat this time. Nick stayed where he was, and Ned took the helm. A gentle breeze took the *Golden Boar* into the sheltered anchorage. The trees encircling the little inland bay shut her in just as the sun went down behind them. And the gallant fellows—strange mixture of pirate and patriot—piously and whole-heartedly bared their heads and thanked

God for His bounteous mercies!

Chapter XL.

A HAVEN OF PEACE.

The night passed; a night of happy contentment. In picturesque groups on the deck the company slept, their eyes covered from the light of the tropical night. The sentry tramped the deck, listened to the cries from the forest and the salty pool, watched the fireflies as they darted to and fro, and called out the hours and the state of the night whenever the ship's bell sent its musical note echoing from bank to bank of the creek, and rousing the denizens of the forest around. A bird sang in the grove, tuning its lay to reproduce the notes of every songster that had warbled during the daytime. The scents from the masses of flowers, that clustered the banks and wound their tendrils round the giant trees, floated fragrantly on the night air. There was peace in the heavens above and the downward glances of the quiet-eyed stars; there was peace in forest and pool, and sweet sounds and fragrant odours; the ship rocked gently on the flowing tide in a haven that might have been a harbour on the shores of a paradise. And the sleeping men dreamed pleasant dreams, for the scents of the flowers came insensibly into their nostrils, and the song of the bird beat rhythmically on their resting brains. Here, a sailor laughed softly and musically in his sleep; there, a gallant young gentleman murmured a beloved name, as the face of the one beloved passed by in a sweet vision of the night. In his sleep many a one was already at the home where he would be; his hard-won treasures glittered on the familiar table, and he gave this to one and that to another, hung a chain on a fair young neck or pressed a ring on a dainty finger. Johnnie Morgan stood by the river, exactly as he had stood on that bright March morning when Dolly came up and begged for a reconciliation. She came again; the gulls flew over the sands, and the sun shone warmly. Ah! how long it was since that March morning.

The feathered singer in the tree ceased his singing, and hid his head under his wing as his bright-plumaged fellows had done. The stars paled; nature stirred in her sleep; the sailor on the deck felt the tremor that quivered through the animate world, and rubbed his eyes more vigorously. A breeze moved through the trees;

the ripple of the water was more distinct; there was a splash—another—another. A frog croaked sleepily to his fellows, and got no answer for a while. A yellow band stretched across the eastern horizon; it tinged the heaving waters, it flecked the trees with gold. The whole forest rustled and twittered. A bird flew down to the water. A parrot screamed noisily; a sleeper started up from his hard couch. The sentinel cried the hour, and announced a fine morning. The world heard him and woke up.

The day was to be a day of great things. Overnight nothing had been done, and no man had gone ashore. The decks were cleaned, prayers said, breakfast eaten, and the rough plan of Oxenham's hiding-place nailed down on the compass-box, where all could see it. Then Captain Drake and the gentlemen of the company went ashore with Nick and Ned Johnson. Hearts beat excitedly in the ship's boat, and hearts throbbed in unison amongst those who waited on the deck. The party landed. They clambered up the bank and pushed aside the tangled undergrowth, some of the men using their swords in order to make the quicker way. Some one kicks against a mass of green creeper; his boot strikes something wooden and hollow; he has not lighted upon an empty bush. Quickly he tears aside the clinging mass; a beautifully striped snake wriggles out, hissing angrily. The man scarcely heeds the dangerous thing. He shouts aloud; the others come up. What has he found? The ruins of one of Oxenham's boats. Nick recognizes it. "I worked to help build it," he says softly. "The Dons came upon us before we could finish." The rough fellow uncovered his head.

The adventurers gazed with a strange interest upon the relic of a former bold adventure. They turned it over almost reverently. "Brave John Oxenham!" murmured Captain Drake.

But sentimental recollections were soon swept away. The discovery of the half-finished boat put aside all doubts as to the identity of their anchorage with that of Oxenham's. "How far off was the treasure buried?" was the next eager question.

"Just out of the tide-way in the heart of a cluster of mangroves; we notched the biggest tree," answered Nick. He looked around. "Yonder's the spot," he cried. All followed him.

The quick-growing vegetation had enwreathed the trees with gay creepers, but Nick soon found the mark of the axe on the bark. Undergrowths choked up

the gaps between the trunks of the trees, but a couple of axes cleared a path. The men thronged into the inner space. The ground was hard and overgrown, and certainly had not been touched for a long time. Hopes rose higher than ever. Apparently the ground had never been disturbed since Oxenham's visit. Captain Drake decided to get to work at once. He rowed back to the ship, ordered the pickaxes and shovels to be brought up from below, and chose out a first gang of sailors and soldiers to go ashore and commence digging. A couple of hours ought to suffice for the securing of the treasure.

The men tumbled into the boat, eager enough to begin. They rowed ashore, stripped themselves to the waist, and set to work with a will, cheering one another on with boisterous jests. Captain Drake remained aboard. Sir John Trelawny and some of the adventurers superintended the digging. Timothy Jeffreys and Johnnie Morgan wandered off along the stream, hoping to light upon some game for the replenishing of the larder. Nick Johnson pointed out a spring, and others of the company busied themselves filling the barrels with fresh water. All were animated, and occupied in some useful way or other.

Chapter XLI.

THE TRAP.

A cheery proverb declares there is no cloud so black that it hath not a silver lining. Conversely we may say that there is no sky so blue that no cloud is gathering in it. The sky over the heads of Captain Drake and his men glowed like a firelit, flawless sapphire; yet behind, where the giant trees shut out the view of the heavens, a cloud was gathering, charged with the very mirk of death.

For days and nights before the *Golden Boar* had come abreast of the mouth of the creek, the summit of the bluff had not been without a keen-eyed sentinel. Squatted on his haunches, or lying prone on the grass, a patient Indian had scanned sea and horizon for a sign of a sail. His watch was duly rewarded. He heard the shout of the lookout man; saw the ship put about for the entrance near which he lay; then he slipped into the trees behind him, and ran down the declivity and through the forest like a creature born to a life in the tree-packed

solitudes. He passed round the bay, and ran for another couple of miles along the creek. Then, in a natural clearing, he came upon a tent around which were gathered about fifty warriors of his own tribe. At the entrance to the tent he bowed himself down to the earth, and lay there until a voice bade him arise.

"The ship of the white men, O my father!"

"Where?"

"They come into the harbourage."

"Get thy canoe." Basil came forth, and was soon speeding down to the bay. He got out on the side opposite to the cluster of mangroves, climbed a tree, and watched the *Golden Boar* as it beat into the narrow entrance from the sea. The sun shone on the gilded monster that stood "rampant" under the bows and lit up the tall figure of Morgan, who stood watching the muddy waters as they ran lapping along the sides of the ship. Basil recognized all, and smiled in triumph. He went back to his tent and dispatched swift messengers along the track across the isthmus; the Spanish troops were lagging somewhere on the road, and must needs be hurried.

All that night, sleepless, noiseless Indians lay near the ship and heard every call of the watch. With the coming of the dawn they slipped farther back, but maintained a close espionage. Basil's messenger returned. The troops were bivouacked not far away. They would start with the earliest light, and might be expected within two hours of sunrising. The natives were sent down to the fringe of the bay to keep unseen watch over every movement of the Englishmen. Basil waited for the white troops. His plans were carefully made, and he hoped to capture the ship and every soul of her company.

Morgan and Jeffreys pushed their way through the trees, seeking some open glade where deer might be feeding. Each carried bow and arrows, so that the quarry might be obtained without raising any alarm that might arouse near-dwelling natives or any chance party of Spaniards. The laughter of their comrades died away behind them little by little, and was presently lost altogether. Once or twice the undergrowth rustled, and both paused, hoping to sight some eatable prey; but they saw nothing, and wandered farther and farther on.

They had gone for nearly a mile, when suddenly an Indian stood in their path. The fellow paused for an instant, then turned and fled as though in affright. Both were about to cry out to reassure him, when they were stealthily assailed from behind. A native cloth or blanket was thrown over the head of each; brown arms closed round and pinioned their limbs. They were thrown to the ground, and a heavy blow on the head rendered them unconscious. They had no chance to cry out, and were trapped with scarcely a struggle. When they recovered their senses they were in a canoe going rapidly up-stream; their heads were still muffled, and their limbs bound with tight thongs.

Between the trees the digging went on merrily enough. About three feet down a skull was found; then another; then various human bones. These gruesome discoveries checked the singing and laughter, and for a while the men worked in silence. But there was nothing to dull the spirits of the water-carriers, and they romped and skylarked like a party of schoolboys. Those on board ship envied their companions who were ashore, and the relief digging party leant over the bulwarks, eager to take their turn amongst the mangroves.

Meanwhile a net of fire and steel was being drawn around the workers.

The net was set; every mesh was tested, and yet the fowler hesitated to draw it in: all the birds were not gathered in the baited area. The water-carriers were too far from the diggers, and the ship rode clear of the shore. The Indian allies hid, waiting with inexhaustible patience. The Spanish troops were restless and ill-controlled. They saw two small parties of Englishmen busily engaged, and without suspicion of danger. It was so easy to form two bands, surround and capture all. Barely a dozen men remained aboard the ship; surely they could seize the vessel at their leisure! The Spanish commander did not possess Basil's gift of caution. He determined to attack, and launched a mixed force against the water-carriers and seized every one. Another band dashed for the mangroves; but warning had been given. Sir John and his gentlemen whipped out their swords, and the workers seized pick-axe and shovel. Captain Drake saw the movement in the trees, shouted an alarm, and at once turned his guns on the rustling patch. A couple of terrific charges followed; trees splintered and crashed, and the Indian allies fled in terror, freeing some of the water-carriers, who plunged at once into the bay and swam to the ship. The group of mangroves was a natural fortress, and the Dons failed to get in at the first rush. The flight of the Indians threw

them into a momentary disorder; and Captain Drake, instant in appreciating an opportunity, turned a gun a little wide of the cluster, and sent a ball smashing into the rallying place of the foe. Covered by the armed gentlemen, the workers retreated to their boat; arrows and a few musket balls flew after them, but the ship's guns again spoke out, and no Don dared show himself. The boat was reached at the cost of a few wounds. At the ship's side the men received arms, and the soldiers aboard leaped down to take the place of the wounded. The boat went ashore once more, and the whole of its company made for the spring, hoping to rescue the men there. The enemy opposed their way, but they drove them before them, and the guns from the vessel swept and cleared the surrounding patches of woodland. The spring was reached; the Dons had fled; and the marks of the short struggle were all the rescue party discovered. They followed the trail for a while, but the foe had got the start and the help of their native guides. The men reluctantly returned to the shore of the bay, fortunately picking up a couple of wounded sailors on their way. The undergrowth around was diligently searched, but it yielded nothing alive.

The ship's roll was called, and the losses counted. No one had seen anything of Jeffreys and Morgan since the first landing; they had gone a-hunting, and their fate could hardly be doubted. The digging party had escaped death and capture, and no man was seriously wounded. Of the water party, the two Johnsons, who had acted as leaders, were wounded and prisoners; three others were captives with them; the rest had escaped. There were no further attempts at digging that day. This was, perhaps, just as well, for the earth contained no treasure. The Dons had seized that long before.

Chapter XLII.

CAPTIVES.

The wonderful name of Drake saved the expedition from irretrievable disaster. "For England, boys!" Sir John had shouted as he laid about him in the mangrove trees. "For Drake and Devon!" shouted a Plymouth tar, and his comrades had hurrahed at his words. "Ay, remember the skipper's name!" Sir John had replied; "defeat and Drake don't go together!" These shouted words,

and the promptness of the round shot from the ship, had really equal effects in scattering the foe. The Spanish commander, when he rallied his men farther back at the springs, asked Nick Johnson who his captain was.

"Drake of Plymouth!" cried Nick; "and take heed to it, ye dirty Papist. Ye'll regret this business before sunset!"

And the soldiers were of their foeman's opinion. Their leader deemed discretion the better part of valour. He had lost some men; his allies had fled; five prisoners were in his hands. So far he could claim a victory, and he was resolved not to lose one leaf from his scanty laurels. "Drake" was an incarnation of the devil; every Don in America knew that; it was useless fighting the redoubtable sailor, for no man could defeat or kill him. The Spanish captain decided on a movement to the rear. In vain Basil stormed and raved, and vowed that the dreaded Drake was not within a thousand leagues of the isthmus. The soldiers remembered that the speaker was a renegade Englishman, and refused to believe him.

Basil left them to go on to Panama, whilst he returned to the Indian camp and the two prisoners whose clever capture he had superintended. The Indians had gone, and Morgan and Jeffreys were left gagged and bound. The Jesuit was furious. His first impulse was to kill his captives and leave their bodies to be found by their companions, who would assuredly make some search for them. But a moment's reflection made him abandon that plan. Had he desired only their death, it would have been easier for the Indians to shoot them than to capture them. One of the two, Morgan, was an old foe; he had done much to thwart the scheme for firing the Forest of Dean, a scheme which would have brought Basil nothing less than a bishopric had it succeeded. He was one of those who had slain Father Jerome, and must expiate his many offences. The angry man had little objection to letting out Master Timothy's life at a blow, but Morgan must have no such easy ending. So he left the two, half-stifled in their blankets, and went into the woods and along the creek, calling in the hope of attracting some stray Indians. After a while, the chief and about a dozen others straggled back.

The tent, wherein Basil had kept up state in order to overawe the simple natives, was packed away into a canoe. The prisoners were put into another, and the company paddled away towards the interior, following by water the course the Spaniards had taken by land.

The two parties met that evening at a native village, and a fierce quarrel broke out betwixt Basil and the Spanish commandant. The civilian accused the soldier of cowardice and indifference that amounted to treachery, and fiercely maintained that a little more wisdom and courage on the part of the troops would have sufficed for the capture of the whole expedition. The captain retorted that he had done his duty with due zeal and discretion, and threatened Basil with a share of the bonds that bound the limbs of his fellow Englishmen. He took Basil's two prisoners and added them to his own captures, asserting that he did so in order to ensure their safe keeping. By easy stages the troops moved west by north along the rivers and over the mountains to Panama, where the Englishmen were formally imprisoned as pirates and wicked enemies of his Majesty King Philip. Basil was soon busily at work in an endeavour to get them accused of heresy rather than piracy, and so put them into the hands of the Inquisition; for the ecclesiastics punished with infinitely greater cruelties than did the King's officers.

A long and anxious council was held that afternoon aboard the *Golden Boar*. For the time, the treasure-hunt was forgotten. Seven members of the company, two of them gentlemen partners in the expedition, were in the hands of the Spaniards. What could be done for their release? From the evidence of those of the watering-party that had escaped, it was plain that the band that had attacked them was as numerous as that which attacked the gold-seekers. The total forces, Spanish and Indian, were considerably over a thousand. Now, if the ship was to be at all adequately guarded and manned, Captain Drake could not spare more than a score of men as a land force. Obviously, this was totally inadequate if the foe stood his ground; so weak a band might be shot down one by one in the forest. Yet no man would leave the coast without making some real effort to aid his captured comrades. The brave fellows could readily put themselves in thought into the places of the unfortunate seven, and they shuddered as they contemplated their possible fate. One man, Paignton Rob, knew Oxenham's route across the isthmus, and he volunteered at once to lead any pursuing party. Should the Johnsons escape, they would almost certainly take this route back. Pursuit was decided upon, and Captain Drake resolved to lead it himself. The whole of the gentlemen adventurers volunteered to accompany him, and Dan Pengelly and Paignton Rob completed the available force. It was small enough to be called a "forlorn hope;" it was brave enough to do desperate deeds if occasion offered.

Since the retreat of the foe no sounds had been heard from the shore. This did

not prove that no enemies were lurking in the thickets, for silence had prevailed until the moment of the double attack. Rob offered to go scouting, but his services as guide were too precious for him to run the risk; and Sir John Trelawny, like the valiant knight he was, went instead. A boat was rowed down into the shelter of the bluff, and he slipped ashore. Scaling the rock, he peered about on all sides, saw nothing suspicious, and advanced into the thick woods. There were plenty signs of the fray, but no sight of a foe. He wound round one side of the curve of the bay, and startled nothing but the birds and a few reptiles. He came down to the water, hailed the ship, and was taken aboard. The captain resolved to start up the creek at nightfall and follow its course into the river.

This was done. Signs of Basil's camp were discovered, and his bivouac searched. Morgan's helmet was found; the pursuers were on the track. A hunt in the near woods revealed nothing of note. Re-embarking they reached an Indian village by midnight, and learned that the foe was encamped at a larger place up the stream. Here was a chance of a night assault. But neither bribes nor threats could prevail with any native to accept the position as guide. The chief finally gave directions which were either wilfully incorrect or misunderstood. The Englishmen, on coming to a parting of the waters, took the wrong course, and found themselves by daylight right in the hills and twenty miles from the place where the captives lay.

They came back and took the other channel, arriving at the halting-place about noon, to find the foe gone and themselves too weary to follow for some hours. Rob and the captain interviewed the chief, but the latter was too fearful of the Spaniards to offer any assistance. The English force in his eyes was too weak to gain any victory, and he would not be on the losing side.

The adventurers pushed forward again in the evening, abandoned their boats, and took to the hills in the hope of cutting off the Spanish retreat. They lost their bearings, and for a while were lost themselves. The pursuit became hopeless, and was reluctantly abandoned.

The party returned to the ship. Nothing further was possible. With a force ten times as great as the one he really commanded, Captain Drake might have attempted a march on Panama itself, for the spirit of the great admiral was strong in him.

Digging was resumed, and the labour was rewarded by the mocking

discovery of a heap of bones. It was plain to every one that the company had been led into a cunningly prepared trap. In the heat of their anger some were for sailing back to Trinidad and sacking San Joseph. The skipper would hear of no such mad enterprise. He set sail for the open sea, his heart full of two desires. He wanted to fall in with some other English ships, and essay an attack on Panama. Failing this, he hoped for the chance of meeting plenty of King Philip's galleons. Large or small, he vowed to assail them and take a terrible requital for his own misfortunes.

His latter hope was realized. He fell in with two ships in his passage through the Indies, and attacked and pillaged both. Although shorn of nearly half his strength by the time he reached the open Atlantic, yet he made for the Azores and captured yet a third galleon, and fell in with a fourth sailing for Panama itself. He boarded this, and gave the captain a letter for the authorities of the isthmian port. In this he declared his intention of paying the place a speedy visit with such a force that he would level the town with the ground if a hair on the head of any captive had been injured. 'Twas a proud, characteristic boast, but it was never carried into effect.

Plymouth was duly reached. The *Golden Boar* brought some goodly treasure to port, many stories of wonderful lands, and a wealth of bad news. There was mourning in Plymouth. And Paignton Rob—weeks after—sat moist-eyed in a cottage at Newnham listening to a maiden's sobs.

Chapter XLIII.

IN PANAMA.

Panama sweltered in a blaze of summer sunshine. The place reeked with heat like a furnace. The smooth sea reflected the glare like a mirror; the white houses dazzled the eyes, and sent fiery darts of pain through them to the brain. The harbour showed no sign of life, the sentinel at the castle nodded at his post, and his excellency the governor lay stretched on a couch at an open window, whilst two slaves fanned him with palm leaves. The streets were empty even of natives. These, emulating their white masters, had crawled into the shade of wall or tree,

and curled up in slumber.

The jail was a long, low building in the southern angle of the castle courtyard. Its walls were of mud baked in the tropical sun, and its roof was of palm-thatch. The windows were mere slits in the thick, hard walls, and gave little light or air. The doors were stout, and tightly barred. Of all the hot corners in the Pacific inferno, the jail corner was the hottest. The place was full; either the long spell of heat or the caprices of the sweltered governor had stirred up an unruly spirit. Several soldiers had mutinied; the natives had been troublesome and restive; a party of sailors had run amuck—doubtless affected by the torrid heat—and so the prison population was at high-water mark. The commandant had much ado to find room for the seven Englishmen. On behalf of the Inquisitors, Basil had offered to relieve him of their company, but the governor had said "No" to the proposal. The seven were confined in one room of fair size, and, except for the heat, were no more comfortless than they would have been in the average English jail. But the heat was fearful! The wretched men sat and stewed in it. Water was not too plentiful in the city, and the native water-carriers had grown lazy; thirst racked the prisoners one and all. They had been shut in for the better part of two weeks, and wondered why they had not been brought to trial. They had expected a short shrift and a speedy execution. Usually these expectations would have been realized, but the governor would not be bothered with any extra work whilst the heat spell lasted, and he had been warned that the "Holy Office" would claim the Englishmen as heretics and blasphemers. This would mean a lengthy wrangle between the military and ecclesiastical authorities, and his sun-dried excellency was not in the mood or condition to preside over heated arguments. The fellows were safe, he said, and would have time to think over their sins, political and religious. Let them alone for a while.

It was the turn of Nick Johnson and Johnnie Morgan to be at the window. A rough bench was drawn up near the opening, and the two knelt thereon and let the hot air—cool compared with the general atmosphere of the prison—blow softly on their faces. They were not allowed to put their heads too near the blessed inlet, for that would shut out the light from their comrades. Their joint occupation of the room had been lengthy enough to give rise to a set of rules for their mutual good and guidance. The law against blocking up the window too closely was a very strict one. From the angle at which he looked out Nick could see the drowsy sentinel.

"'Twill be such a day as this that will give us our chance of freedom," he said.

"Could we but get out now, we might parade the streets unchallenged for an hour. The Dons are in no hurry either to hang or burn us, and we cannot wait their convenience. If the Indian will only bring us the arrowhead that he promised, we will try our legs about noon tomorrow. We ought to take a block out of this wall in twenty-four hours."

Johnnie nodded; his mouth was too parched for speaking. Nick's voice was very like a raven's croak, and he licked his dry lips and relapsed into silence. Their spell at the window came to an end. They stepped down, and went to a corner. Two sailors took their places.

The stifling afternoon passed, and left the captives limp, panting, and exhausted. As the shadows lengthened, the stir of life arose anew in the castle. Towards evening the jailer visited his charges, and an Indian came with him bearing a pitcher of water and some cakes of native corn. The soldier stood whilst the man deposited his burden; then both turned and went out without speaking a word. The cakes were passed round, and each man quickly broke his open. Nothing was secreted in them, and eager looks were changed to those of disappointment. Morgan took up the pitcher, drank, and passed to Jeffreys, who handed it to Nick; and so it went round, each drinking a little, curbing his desires in order that some of the precious liquid might remain for the wakeful watches of the night. Darkness came, but it brought little or no rest. Swarms of mosquitoes came in and bit their hapless victims mercilessly as they tossed and turned on the bare earthen floor. The nights of captivity were worse than the days. At intervals the pitcher went round; but the water had got lukewarm, and refreshed them little enough.

Day broke, and the pitcher circulated for a last time. The tilting of the vessel brought a happy discovery: the Indian had been true to his promise. A small spearhead was wedged across the bottom.

Here was hope, and also employment during the dreary hours. Nick seized the welcome implement with a cry of joy, and he could not be persuaded to refrain from using it at once. He measured Morgan's shoulders on the wall.

"This," said he, "must be the width of the hole. Let me trace it."

In the corner, from the floor upwards, he marked off a rectangular space.

"We shall have to loosen a block of wall this size, push it out at the right

moment, crawl through, put it back again to avert suspicion, and then make the best of our way into the forest. That was how we escaped from Vera Cruz; the trick should serve us a second time."

"Three hide better than seven," suggested Jeffreys.

"And seven can fight better than three," added the sailor. "We shall do no good in the forest without weapons. The game will not walk to our fire to be cooked. Either Dons or Indians must furnish us. We lie here, sheep in a pen, awaiting the butcher. If I am to die in Panama, let it be no sheep's death."

Each heart echoed these sentiments, and all resolved to risk the desperate chances for life and liberty. Operations were commenced at once. It was no great undertaking to remove, with proper tools, a block of baked clay, some three feet or so by two feet, from a typical Panama wall. The prison wall was about three feet thick, and almost as hard as an English brick. The spearhead was of the small sort, and really little better than a large arrowhead; fortunately it was almost new, and well sharpened. Nick began working at the floor level, and the first part of the process was to work the three feet odd along the base of the wall and back into it until only a thin shell was left on the outer side. The work could only progress slowly, for there must be little sound of scraping or ringing of iron on the stone-like clay, and all dust from the working must be dispersed about the floor. Two watched at the window all the time. Interruptions were many and sometimes lengthy, and after three hours of broken labour the workers had only got some two inches back into the wall along the floor line. But noon and the death-like stillness of "siesta" gave them a better opportunity. A shaft that had been procured some days previously was fished out from its hiding-place, and fitted to the spearhead. Working in short shifts, by the space of an hour the floor line was worked through so that daylight was visible in one or two places, and the upright line in the angle of the wall was worked full depth back to a height of half a foot. In the late afternoon, after the visit of the jailer, a groove sufficiently deep to guide them in the darkness was made all round. The work was to be finished when castle and town sank to silence after nightfall.

The oppressive heat of the past weeks was broken just after sunset by a terrific thunderstorm, and the fury of the elemental outburst covered all noises and allowed the toilers to work without any precaution. But, alas! their very haste was their undoing. The head, blunted and worn, broke off short in the depth of the wall. Attempts to extricate it in the darkness only wedged it in more

tightly. With a groan of despair, the wearied men gave up their task, and sought slumber.

The first gleams of stormy daylight found some of them awake, feverishly at work stuffing the tell-tale grooves with dust moistened by the last drains of the water in their pitcher. As yet the great block was quite immovable, and another implement must be obtained to complete the task. The flood waters from the courtyard had trickled in through the apertures made near the floor, and under-garments were taken off, and the betraying waters swabbed up. Some of the little band huddled in the corner when the jailer came in with breakfast, and he went out, having seen and suspected nothing. The Indian looked inquiringly at the Englishmen, but they were unable to give him any hint of their wants.

The day passed. The sky cleared; then the clouds gathered again, and there was another deluge. Panama was flooded out. The sun went down behind a black veil, but towards midnight the stars came out, and a delightfully cool breeze swept in at the window to soothe the fevered bodies within prison walls. What a chance of escape they had missed during the noisy hours of the storm, when not a soul was abroad in the place! Knowing the opportunity was there, they tried desperately to force the door. But the feat was far beyond all the strength at their command.

And the morning, delicious in its cool and fragrant freshness, brought despair. The governor, who like the trees had drooped in the heat, revived with the rain, and set about the duties of his position with some vigour. The Englishmen were informed that when "siesta" was over they would be brought into the castle hall for trial and judgment. The flood had washed away their chances of escape. They solemnly and in silence shook hands as men saying a long farewell.

Chapter XLIV.

THE TRIAL.

No bonds had been placed upon the limbs of the Englishmen since the day when the Spanish captain had taken them out of the hands of Basil. They walked

unfettered to the judgment hall, and stood without shackles before their judges. The court was crowded; it was not every day that a band of terrible fire-eating Englishmen was on view in Panama. Rumour spoke of them as friends and companions of Drake, and Spaniards and Indians alike were eager to gaze upon the prisoners. The governor was chief judge; beside him, on the one hand sat the deputy-governor, and on the other was placed the chief ecclesiastical dignitary of the colony. Basil stood by the cleric's side. Johnnie caught sight of him, and stared him almost out of countenance. He had not seen him on the day of his capture in the forest, but had caught glimpses of him on the march. Recollections struggled in his mind. Where had he seen the fellow before? Nick Johnson, too, felt that he had seen or heard of a dark-eyed, sallow-faced fellow who resembled the man in court.

The proceedings opened, and the civil authorities formally charged the prisoners with piracy and invasion of the territory of King Philip of Spain. The bishop instantly opposed, and claimed to have the charge amended to one of heresy and murderous opposition to the Church. The governor asked for evidence in support of his claim. A nod to Basil, and the latter began a speech for the prosecution. Master Jeffreys stopped him by an appeal to the governor.

"May it please your excellency," he said, "my comrades have no knowledge of Spanish, and I have but little. I am persuaded that your excellency, as a soldier and a gentleman of honour, is anxious to give us a fair trial. There is peace between our Queen and King Philip; there should at least be justice and fair-dealing betwixt you and us. Mine ears tell me that yonder man is more accustomed to speak my tongue than yours; his Spanish hath the same rough English smack about it as hath mine own. I pray you that he may say to us in English what he saith to you in the language of Spain."

Basil reddened and turned to his superior; but the governor, though indolent and capricious, was a man of some honour and chivalry. He told the accuser to speak alternately in the language of the court and that of the prisoners.

Very few sentences in English were necessary to enlighten Johnnie as to Basil's identity. He could now see the spiteful face that confronted him on a memorable morning in the shades of Dean Forest. He listened intently. The harangue was long and tedious, and endeavoured to prove that the tallest prisoner was a contumacious heretic, who had fought against the Holy Church, frustrated her lawful efforts at the conversion of England, and had slain two

noble and saintly missionaries and servants of King Philip—to wit, a certain Jesuit father, Jerome, and a monk named John. The prisoner had also repeatedly attempted the life of the speaker. As for the others, one at least had attempted the speaker's life in Plymouth, well knowing who and what he was; and all the others were aiders and abettors.

Johnnie heard, and asked if he had the right of reply.

"Most certainly," said the governor. "This is a court of law, and it is our boast and pride that we give justice without fear or favour."

Whereupon Morgan, with Jeffreys as interpreter, gave his version of the incidents in the forest. A plot, to which no king could have been a party, was set afoot by his accuser and others to destroy a forest over which he (Morgan) was a duly appointed guardian. He fought the conspirators by way of simple duty to his trust. Could he do less and hold up his head amongst honourable men? His accuser and his confederates had basely attempted to assassinate two noble Englishmen—to wit, Admiral Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh, a close friend and counsellor of England's Queen. He asked whether Spain fought with the weapons of assassins, and whether King Philip, as a Christian and friendly monarch, could be a party to any such dastardly conduct. The governor was a gentleman of honour, and could answer for his sovereign.

The governor promptly denied that "His Most Catholic Majesty" could ever countenance such deeds. Johnnie bowed and thanked him, and resumed his defence. He dealt with the questions of piracy and invasion of Spanish dominions. England and Spain were, he declared, at peace, and no official could deny an Englishman the right to travel peaceably in Spanish dominions, unless a law expressly excluded them. Any Spaniard, so long as he did nothing to harm the Queen or the government, might travel in England, and claim the protection of its laws as a peaceful sojourner in the land. Surely the Spaniards were not going to be outdone in matters of international courtesy. As regards the New World, the Englishman contended that it was open to explorers and colonizers of all Christian nations, and Spain could not claim it as her own unless she also occupied it.

The governor heard Morgan patiently, and hearkened to Master Jeffreys whilst he expounded his ideas of the rights of England in the New World. Then his excellency summed up the case. He ruled that the two gentlemen adventurers

were not prisoners of the Holy Office, but of his Majesty. The charges against them were those of piracy and invasion. They had certainly been captured on Spanish soil in the act of appropriating—or endeavouring to appropriate—treasures that belonged to Spain. Moreover, they were companions of a Captain Drake, who, with his brother, the admiral, had been guilty of repeated and gross piracies on the high seas. Their guilt was fully established, and by law they ought to be taken down to the harbour and hanged in chains, as a warning to others. Mercy, however, should be shown them; their lives would be spared, but they must serve ten years in the galleys. A hint was given, after a whispered consultation with the bishop, that renunciation of their Protestant heresies would bring about a material lightening of their sentences.

The five seamen were next put on trial. Basil promptly claimed the Johnsons as fugitives from the Inquisition. The cropped ears and lost thumbs were convincing evidence against them, and they were handed over to the Church, to be dealt with according to the law ecclesiastical. An attempt to claim the other three sailors failed. The governor would not quit his hold on them. His own galley was sadly undermanned, and he could not let three stout and skilled oarsmen slip through his fingers. He looked longingly upon the two crop-eared fellows, and begrudged the Church the possession of them. But he remembered with a sigh that there must be give and take in this world, and five out of seven was not a bad proportion.

The court broke up. The five galley-slaves were taken back to their cell for that night. Nick and Ned were walked away in charge of the jailers of the Inquisition. Their ultimate fate was to be decided the next day.

Chapter XLV.

FOR FAITH AND COUNTRY!

The trial of the two brothers was a very elaborate and ceremonial business. The Inquisition Court, with the bishop presiding, sat for about three hours. There was reading of papers, citing of ecclesiastical and royal decrees, and a good deal of argument between the bishop, the Chief Inquisitor, and Brother Basil. Through all this wordy process the two sailors stood, or lounged, or chatted quietly together. At first they had listened, hoping to glean a little information; but as Latin predominated over Spanish, and they understood no word of the former and only the New World barbaric mixture of the latter, they soon ceased to pay attention, and lawyers and ecclesiastics droned on as long as it pleased them to do so.

In the last few minutes the interest swung round to the prisoners. Basil ordered them to attend and answer truthfully certain questions the court desired to put to them. The two lean, brown bodies were straightened, and two pairs of keen, clear eyes stared into Basil's shifty orbs.

"Are you sons of the same parents?"

"Yes."

"Names?"

"Nicodemus and Edward."

"Nationality?"

"English, God be thanked!" answered Nick.

"Amen! brother," said Ned.

"Religion?"

The two rough fellows looked at one another. The question was really a puzzler. Living their lives out on the sea, unlettered and unlearned, they had no knowledge of religious formularies.

"We believe in God and Jesus Christ His Son," said Nick. "Is that so, brother?"

"That is so," said Ned; "those are the names that come in the chaplain's prayers."

"Do you acknowledge the authority of his Holiness the Pope of Rome?"

Another look of consultation, and Ned shook his head. Nick answered. "We do not believe in the Pope. We did as boys during Mary's reign."

"Why did you change?"

"Queen and Parliament no longer believe in him, but hate him for an enemy. We believe in our Queen and Parliament. Will that do, brother?"

"Beautifully. Tell the truth and shame the devil. We have drunk confusion to the Pope in many a cup of sack, and in good company too—with Franky Drake and Jack Hawkins, Jacob Whiddon, and a host of bonny sailor-men. No, brother, we do not believe in the Pope, although there are some honest fellows and many rogues who do. We must stand by the words passed to old comrades."

There was a brief consultation on the judges' bench, and the bishop gave it as his opinion that the two men were utterly ignorant on religious questions, and simply believed what they were told to believe. He himself, in pursuance of the duties of his sacred office, would expound the true faith to them, and show them the heresies of their own lightly-held belief. Whereupon his lordship addressed the prisoners for the better part of an hour in very dignified Spanish and scholarly Latin. The two paid earnest attention, for the ecclesiastic's tone was kindly, almost fatherly. They understood little of what he said, and Basil was not allowed to interpret, as the bishop believed that his own voice and words would have greater weight, and it was acknowledged that the Englishmen had a fair knowledge of Spanish.

As the good man sipped a cup of wine and fanned himself after his episcopal exhortation, Basil briefly questioned the prisoners again. The bishop had shown them their errors in matters of faith; were they prepared to recant, and re-enter the fold from which they had ignorantly strayed?

These questions were plain enough, and the brothers looked at one another

once more. Both heads shook. Nick spoke out. "We are not able," he said, "to judge between Pope and Parliament, or between one bishop and another. Our faith and our country are one; our home and our Church are one. We are loyal Englishmen, and will stick to Queen, Parliament, and friends because we love them and believe in them and know that they will never betray or desert us. We hold the faith of our friends, and cannot, without dishonour, turn and accept the faith of our foes."

The bishop was angry at this sturdy answer. His vanity was piqued that two rude sailors should be so uninfluenced by his learned discourse. He ordered Basil to tell them what the inevitable consequences of their obstinacy would be.

The two brothers listened calmly enough. "Will you recant now?"

"Is it 'No,' brother Ned?"

"It is 'No!'"

"No!" said Nick; "and God help us both!"

Then sentence was pronounced. It was that the next evening, an hour before sundown, the two should be led to a stake fixed in the market-place of the town and there publicly burnt, in the hope that the destruction of their bodies by fire might save their souls from the everlasting flames of hell. The bishop spoke the sentence, and Basil translated it piece by piece. The toil-worn figures in the prisoners' dock became more fixed and rigid as the dread words fell, one by one. All was said. The brothers faced one another, and there was deathly pallor whitening the tan of their cheeks. They shook hands silently, then kissed; then hand in hand, like two children, they walked away between the guards, and the most curious onlooker never saw even the tremor of an eyelid.

That night earnest priests, zealous enough according to the narrow ideas of the time, place, creed, and race, visited the doomed men and exhorted them to forsake their errors. Always they got the same simple, faithful, patriotic reply. They served their Queen, their country, their captain. What these believed, they believed, and held to be right. Faith with them was a matter of national obligation and faithfulness to their leaders and comrades. To deny the faith was to deny the principles that had ruled their lives. Such treason to country and conscience was impossible. They thanked the priests for their ministrations, and begged after a while to be left alone. A request that they might speak with

Morgan or Jeffreys was refused, but a young monk promised to take a message of affectionate farewell. He fulfilled the promise, and the simple, childlike, yet valiant words cheered many a terrible hour in the months that followed.

Nicodemus Johnson, and Edward his brother, died at the stake in Panama at the time and on the spot appointed. A curious and silent crowd watched the agonizing passing away of the two brave, simple-hearted fellows; and, Spaniard and Indian alike, they went away profoundly impressed. A brighter lustre was added to the name "Englishman." It is difficult to say whether the noble fellows were martyrs most to religion or country. So little versed were they in religious practices that they hardly knew a prayer for use in their last hours, and their last thoughts and visions were not of heaven, but of the green fields and blue waters of England.

The stakes were placed side by side, and, as the hands and arms were left free, the brothers could touch one another.

When the fagots were lighted, and the stifling smoke rolled up into their faces. Nick stretched out his hand and sought that of his younger brother. "God bless us, brother, and forgive us whatever we have done amiss!" he cried.

"God bless England and give her victory over her enemies," replied Ned.

And hand in hand—the loving, tortured grip heartening them to endure the awful agony—the brothers died.

"*Dulce et decorum est pro patriâ—et fide—mori!*"

Chapter XLVI.

THE GALLEY SLAVES.

The great heats were past; the climate along the Panama littoral was bearable, and the governor decided to pay official visits to the stations along the coast. The bishop thought the occasion favourable for a tour of pastoral inspection, and

decided to go with his excellency. Other functionaries, with other duties to perform, hinted to the governor's secretary or the bishop's chaplain that the official progress would be more imposing if they were included. Thus it came to pass that a notable company embarked on the *Santa Maria* on a certain cool October day.

Besides those that went aboard the galley willingly, hoping for pleasure and profit, there were about one hundred and fifty hapless wretches who were dragged down to the water-side in chains, and then chained to the place they must occupy during the whole of the voyage. Amongst these were Morgan, Jeffreys, and the three sailors from the *Golden Boar*.

The *Santa Maria* was about one hundred and thirty feet long and fifteen feet beam, a galley of a somewhat broad and clumsy make. In the fore-part was a small raised deck, with three guns, and rough hatches underneath for the sailors, soldiers, and servitors concerned in the working of the sails and helm, the defence and the comfort of the dignitaries aboard. In the after-part was another raised deck of more generous dimensions, and on it were the cabins and state-rooms belonging to the governor, the bishop, the captain, and the gentlemen of the retinues belonging to the great personages. Midway between the two decks were the human engines that propelled the unwieldy craft. Twenty-five benches ran down along the starboard side and the larboard, and from each bench a great oar or sweep projected into the water. To each bench were chained three luckless slaves—seventy-five down each side, and a hundred and fifty in all. The benches were intended for four rowers apiece, and could at a pinch accommodate five. The supply of able-bodied prisoners was small, and the Indians refused to undertake the work at a wage, so three men were compelled to manage oars that were a heavy tax on the strength of four. There was a slight compensation in this—the three had room to lie more comfortably at night-time. Between the two lines of benches ran a narrow raised platform, and along this two boatswains walked, whip in hand, to keep the rowers up to their work, and to visit severely any attempt at shirking the forced duties of their unhappy position. About a score of the slaves were white men: there were two Englishmen besides the five from the *Golden Boar*, the rest being Spaniards or Portuguese convicted of some crime; but the majority of the rowers were Indians, who on some pretext or other had been enslaved and sent in chains to the oars.

The company were all aboard; some in satins and velvets, in glistening armour; some in modest fustian; and as many in nothing but a dirty waist-cloth.

The guns from the castle roared out; those of the galley spoke in answer. The trumpeters blew a fanfare; the chief boatswain sounded his whistle; there was a simultaneous crack of two long, cowhide whips, and the human machine in the waist of the galley began its rhythmic work that put life and motion into the vessel.

At number three oar on the starboard side Morgan and Jeffreys tugged, and a Spaniard sat between them. In a line with them were the three sailors of Captain Drake's crew, and at benches numbers one and two larboard and starboard Europeans slaved. Behind them streamed brown lines of meek-faced Indians. In the ordering of his rowers, the Spanish captain did not forget those whose skins were of the same hue as his own, and he spared himself and them the degradation of toiling and suffering side by side with the inferior race; the white men had the fore-part of the benches to themselves. All were stripped to the waist; that was necessary down in the stifling den: moreover the boatswains objected to putting the whip to any back that was covered; they liked to see the effect of the lash, and judge whether the blow was sufficient.

The galley moved out of the harbour in stately fashion; at the peak of the foremast floated the banner of Spain; on either side of the helm the flags of the governor and the bishop fluttered gaily—fraternal strips of emblazoned silk. It was a fair sight and a fair day, and there were proud eyes watching it; but, as is too often the case, the tinsel and show of human vain-glory enshrouded many aching hearts.

The Spaniard that sat between Morgan and Jeffreys was a powerful, black-bearded fellow, inured to his lot by three years of slavery at the oar. The Englishmen were also of uncommon size and strength, so they could keep their sweep going without putting all their energies into their stroke as some of the rowers were forced to do. Behind them, where the Indians rowed, there was more than one stinging lash and squeal of pain before the harbour was cleared. Morgan's cheek flushed at the first cry, and he almost lost grip of his oar. The slip was noted instantly, and a warning, "Steady at number three," recalled him to his task. Jeffreys gave him a look, and the Spaniard cursed volubly at his companion's clumsiness.

"Keep a civil tongue, Hernando," called out the boatswain; "your friend has not had as much practice as yourself; he'll improve."

Hernando spat on the floor. "Dog! son of a dog!" he muttered. "I'll choke 'Hernando' out of his throat. Time was when he addressed me as 'Signer,' and grovelled for favours."

"Pardon, comrade," said Johnnie.

"Granted! granted!" replied the Spaniard. "I meant no offence to you; but you will see that if anything goes wrong at this oar, yonder villain will visit my back with his whip. He always does so."

"I'll do my best to keep the whip from all of us," answered the Englishman. He bent his back to the shameful work, and felt, in the bitterness of his degradation, something less than human. The thoughts that surged through his brain are too pitiful to be set down here. Chained down in a filthy den, liable to be whipped like a beast of burden, fed upon stuff that was but one remove from offal—how horrible! And he could not forget that about a year before he had stood in the court of his sovereign, proud, happy, praised; great men shook him familiarly by the hand, and a winsome maiden smiled upon him. Now he was a chained slave, doomed to work, eat, and sleep on a narrow plank for ten long years. Ten years! could he survive ten days of the horror and squalor and degradation?

The morning wore on. The upper decks were radiant with sunshine, cool with fresh breezes, and gay with laughter. The hold steamed like an oven, stank most offensively, and groaned with anguish. The rowers began to feel the strain, and the captain ordered the broad, lateen sails to be set on both masts. The breeze was well behind, the galley under good way, and for half an hour or so the sweeps were ordered in, and the slaves fed with a lump of coarse biscuit and refreshed with a pannikin of tepid water. Morgan and Jeffreys sat and talked quietly, and called out a cheery word to the three sailors, whose British hearts were bursting with shame and anger.

In the heat of noon the breeze dropped, and the oars were set vigorously to work again. His excellency wanted quicker progress to be made, so the boatswains commenced to chant a rude song as they walked up and down, and called on the rowers to keep time to the swing of the tune. The fellows did their best, and some of the Spanish slaves joined in the chorus. The song, poor as it was heartened them a little; but the spurt did not last long and the singing ceased. The boatswains used other means. Sometimes it was a sharp word or an angry

oath, at others a crack of the whip in the air; too often the thong came down with a cruel cut on bare flesh, and there was a cry or an oath from the victim and a frantic tugging at the great oar.

Thus the day wore on; long spells of rowing, short periods of rest; and all the while the slaves grew fainter and yet fainter in their horrible workroom, and the lash of the whips resounded the more often. Hernando was lashed twice, for no real reason that his companions could discover. The second blow curled across the muscle of his arm and benumbed it for a while, and Johnnie whispered him to move in rhythm with them, whilst he and Jeffreys did the actual rowing. The fellow was grateful, and vowed by the Virgin never to forget the kindness.

The late afternoon brought the governor to his first place of call. Rowing ceased; the anchor was dropped, and the slaves were given their supper of biscuit, a scrap of meat, and a pannikin of water just coloured with wine—this last was a special gift from the governor. Then, wearied and aching, they curled up like tired dogs on the benches, adjusted their chains so as to relieve themselves of as much weight as possible, and fell asleep.

Chapter XLVII.

HERNANDO SPEAKS.

The governor's progress lasted about five weeks. The galley sometimes lay at anchor for several days, and on these occasions the slaves went ashore for a time in chained gangs for the sake of the fresh air and the walking exercise; but they spent the greater part of the day chained to the benches, and always slept on them at night. At one place there had been some insubordination amongst the garrison, so the governor paraded the whole of his gaunt, dishevelled, whip-scarred crew through the town, in order to impress the disloyal ones with the power and terror of the law.

During these weeks, and especially during the times of leisure in harbour, the two Englishmen got better acquainted with their companion. At first the Spaniard was moody and inclined to be spiteful: he could not forget that his

neighbours were English; but Johnnie's repeated acts of courtesy and kindness, and his cheeriness at times when the three sailors from the *Golden Boar* got dangerously despondent, broke down the barrier of race and creed and speech. Hernando began to talk of himself. He had been a gentleman adventurer aboard a Spanish ship; was hot-tempered and impatient of official control. On several occasions whilst in harbour at Panama he had come into wordy conflict with the authorities. A sailor aboard his vessel, who had acted as his servant, abused his trust, and had been soundly thrashed in consequence, had gone to the governor with a plausible story concerning a conspiracy which he declared his master was hatching. Hernando was in bad odour with the authorities at the time; had been certainly guilty of rash and foolish speeches; so the story was believed, and he was sent to the galleys. The treacherous servant was rewarded with the post of boatswain, and he used his authority over his old master with the most offensive vindictiveness.

The Europeans talked with one another fairly freely. Morgan and Jeffreys were looked up to by the English section. The two stranger sailors had both been captured in Spanish waters some years before, and, after a period in the jail of Cadiz, sent out to the Indies; they had been galley slaves at Panama for about two years.

One afternoon whilst lolling on his bench, no boatswain or free sailor within hearing, Hernando asked his two English comrades whether they had considered the idea of attempting an escape. They replied that at first they had thought of nothing else, but no ways or means offered, and they had almost abandoned the idea. They detailed the story of their attempt to escape from the prison in Panama. The Spaniard listened carefully.

"Now," he said, "I have seen chances of escape from these chains over and over again; not for one man, mind you, but for a body of resolute fellows who would follow a leader. There are some thorough rascals chained to these benches; I have sounded them, and found that I dared not trust them. It is not difficult for a man to earn his freedom by turning traitor on his comrades; indeed, it is well known that liberty will be given for the betrayal of any plot for revolt: a coward or rogue would take such a chance instantly."

"What about the Indians?" asked Jeffreys.

"Sheep! I do not count upon them, and I have shown you that we dare not

depend much on some of our own colour. It is the coming of you two and the three sailors from your ship that has revived my hopes and plans. All the world knows how you Englishmen can fight. I know it, and have hated you for it. I hope to live and find my hatred turned to esteem and affection. The two sailors that were here before you I sounded long ago. One is eager enough; the other has become broken-spirited, and hesitates to venture upon anything where failure would add to his present miseries. Five of you are strong, and not yet cowed at all by the lash. The whip will never cow me. I have a revenge to take; and I will take it, or die in a bold attempt to do so. There are seven of us prepared to plot and dare all in the dash for liberty; one of your countrymen is weak. I can depend pretty confidently on four of my own tongue, and on the gray-bearded Portugee at number one oar. The cut-throats and thieves, that help to make up our number, will fight stoutly enough if suddenly they find themselves free and armed. Love of plunder and thirst for slaughter and revenge will nerve them. But we must not trust them beforehand. The poor Indians, too, will strike a blow at their oppressors if a clear chance of freedom offers."

"You are not hoping for an opportunity in one of these harbours?"

"No, nor in Panama either. Our chance will not come on this voyage; there are too many troops aboard. But we sometimes go out with empty cabins; no one but the captain and his officers. Stores have to be carried from port to port, and treasure fetched from places farther down the coast. It is then, at night, that our hour will come. We must watch for it, prepare for it, and use it without hesitation. Are you with me in the matter?"

"Heart and soul! Heart and soul!"

A boatswain's step was heard, and nothing more was said.

Chapter XLVIII.

THE REVOLT OF THE SLAVES.

The *Santa Maria* returned to Panama. The governor had no further need of

her for a while, so she lay anchored about two cables' length from the quay. The slaves remained aboard, still chained to their benches. The chain that went around their waists was attached to another piece fastened to a ring in the seat itself. This attached piece was just long enough to allow a man to rise and stand upright, but it gave him no chance to take a step in any direction. The galley arrived in harbour in the late afternoon, and pulled in alongside the quay wall. For a couple of hours there was plenty of bustle and confusion aboard; much coming and going of soldiers, sailors, and servitors. Hernando looked eagerly up to the bulwarks many times, as though expecting something; and on more than one occasion he moved his oar three times quickly up and down, just touching the water each time. A sailor ran along the top of the bulwarks, holding to the rigging. The fellow gave a quick glance down, and something dropped into the Spaniard's lap. A minute or two later he was back again; something was dropped this time also. The short twilight had just commenced. A little afterwards the boatswain's whistle sounded, the oars moved, and the galley was rowed out to her berthing station.

The journey that day had been a long one; the unfortunate slaves were half dead with fatigue. The anchor chains rattled, and the great sweeps were drawn in. Lanterns flashed along the boatswains' bridge; cakes, water, and a little fruit were handed down to be eaten and drunken in the dark.

"The saints be praised!" ejaculated Hernando when the last lantern disappeared; "they will not trouble to fetter us to-night. I have prayed all day that they might not. They trust to our fatigue and the guns of the fort. To-morrow we shall probably be chained hand and foot at the oncoming of night. We often get this freedom the first night in harbour, especially if we come in late and wearied. This is our chance, and my friend knew it."

The Spaniard passed a file to Morgan. "I have had one or two of these dropped on several occasions before, but have always thrown them into the water before morning, being afraid to trust my fellows and use them. I signalled for them to-day. Shall we make the venture?"

"The chance is desperate," whispered Johnnie.

"So must any chance be. The guard aboard will be small and sleepy; our limbs are free; we lie a fair distance from the shore. We are never so loosely guarded as when in Panama itself."

The two Englishmen remained silent for perhaps three or four minutes, thinking the matter out. "Let's try, and God be with us!" said Jeffreys. "If we fail, then death is preferable to life in this foetid pit, chained up and treated like dogs."

"I agree!" answered Johnnie.

He and Hernando sat themselves astride the bench, so as to get at the ring that attached the waist chain to the one that was fixed into the seat. This ring necessarily underwent a lot of friction as the men moved about at the oars, and the three had given the ring as much chafing as possible for some two or three weeks. Moreover, the steam from the panting bodies, the mists and spray from the sea, rusted and ate into the iron. There was no chain factory nearer than Europe, and fetters were not easily renewable in Spanish America. In fact, the bonds of the slaves were by no means secure; but they were quite sufficient for their purpose, seeing that the men were keenly watched by day, and when in harbour shackled and manacled at night.

There was a buzz of talking, and plenty of weary shuffling and moaning down on the slaves' deck. Chains clanked and rattled incessantly, and would never be silent for long all through the night, for restless sleepers would toss and turn on their hard couches to relieve pressure on limbs only too often covered with festering and verminous sores. Still, the noise of a file might be detected as an unusual sound; but Hernando and Johnnie took the ring tightly in the palm of the hand, and filed so carefully that Jeffreys, by droning a doleful tune, was able to cover all the noise they made.

The worn ring was soon filed through, and ten minutes later Jeffreys had detached himself, and the bench chain was swinging free under the seat. The files were passed along to the sailors from the *Golden Boar*, and after a while they were free. No man moved so as to betray the fact. The files came across the gangway, and were passed to the Indians behind. Hernando had let them into the plot, preferring to trust them rather than the white scum. Nine men were soon able to move; the waist chains still girdled them, but this did not interfere with freedom and action, and no time was thrown away in an attempt to cut them through. The three Indians behind the sailors were next liberated. A dozen eager and desperate men were ready to make a dash for life, and hardly two hours had gone by.

"How many more?" whispered Johnnie.

"We must wait before trusting any others," replied the wary Spaniard.

About an hour was allowed to slip by. The freed men laid themselves on their benches and feigned slumber. Twice during the time a sentinel passed along the gangway, and flashed a lantern here and there on to the huddled forms. His glance was of a cursory description. The toil-worn lines of wretched beings lay just as he had seen them a hundred times: some were still as dead logs; others moved and babbled in their sleep; here and there one sat with his head in his hands, bowed down with sleep or agonizing thought. There was nothing unusual; only the familiar scenes and sounds of the slave deck at night. The sentinel walked off to the fore-deck to get a breath of sweeter air and the company of a sailor comrade.

The slaves slept. Being, for the most part, without hope of anything better than a few hours of forgetfulness between the sun-setting and the dawn, the majority gave themselves willingly and thankfully to slumber as soon as the scanty supper was eaten. No flash of a sentinel's lantern, no tramping of feet, no cry of nocturnal bird or beast would waken them; they sank into sleep as into some deep, soundless, lightless pit. God rest all such unhappy ones!

The sentry showed no signs of paying any further visit; the captain was ashore. Hernando slipped from his seat, cautiously wakened the fourth English sailor, and gave him a file with whispered instructions; then he passed on to a trustworthy fellow-countryman of his own and gave him the other. He came back to his bench, and waited for about another quarter of an hour. "Now," he whispered to his two companions. He dropped to the floor and crawled on all fours to the after-part of the ship. No one else moved. After what seemed almost an endless time, he crawled back again. "The way is clear; not three men are awake above our heads. I'll take the Indians; they move as noiselessly as cats."

The Spaniard went to the fore-part of the ship, and three Indians behind him in single file. The other three moved stealthily from bench to bench and awoke their fellows. Hardly a sound had been made. The three sailors from the *Golden Boar* and Master Jeffreys crawled above deck; Morgan remained in command below.

Minutes passed. A slight sound of a scuffle, a cry, came faintly from the fore-

deck. Then dead silence fell again. Time flew on. The tide was beginning to run out; the galley swung with it. The Indians, stolid enough as a rule, began to fidget on their seats. A lantern appeared at the fore end of the rowers' pit. Jeffreys came along.

"Well?" asked Morgan anxiously.

"Ugh! an ugly business. Not a man lives of the crew or guard in the fore-part of the vessel. Hernando's knives and Indian fingers have done their deadly work. Are all awake?"

"Not the Europeans."

"Awaken them; here's a hammer and chisel; get their chains off. Hernando and his Indians are gone to the after-deck to block up the cabin doors. Our three boys are at the anchor. Keep this lantern. We have padded the hawse-hole, but there'll be some noise getting the anchor up. Have the rowers ready for my signal."

There was soon clatter and even clamour amongst the slaves, and Morgan had much ado to keep the wilder ones from shouting and running on deck. One Spaniard who tried to do so, intent upon robbery, was promptly knocked down. "You're not safe yet," cried Johnnie; "you're still in harbour and under the fort guns; you'll sit down and row, or go overboard to the sharks." The fellow poured out a torrent of foul language, but the Englishman's fist was hard, his own oar-comrades were against him, so he sat down and made ready for work.

"Ready?"—Jeffreys' voice.

"Yes."

The anchor rattled on the deck.

"Pull for life and liberty!" called Morgan.

A great sigh ran along the benches; dark figures swayed in the faint light; the splash of oars sounded above the lap of the tide; the great galley was under way and going seawards. The time was some minutes short of midnight.

Panama was asleep. The men rowed slowly, making as little noise as possible

until clear of the swarm of canoes and small craft that hung about in the bay. Then they went to work with a will. The oars creaked and groaned; the vessel rolled to the ocean swell. The officers awoke in their cabins only to find themselves trapped. Dawn found the galley well out of sight of land and going northwards.

Chapter XLIX.

EASTWARD HO!

Panama awoke with the sun, discovered the flight of the galley, and made ready for pursuit. There were some small craft in the bay, and these were manned with Indians and soldiers and sent out to sea; but they came back as they went. Truth to tell, the flotilla would have stood no chance against the guns of the *Santa Maria,* and those aboard the tossing boats knew that.

Thereafter, for some weeks, the town lived its nights in alarm. Fires burned along the fort and on the most seaward points of the bay. No man expected other than that the slaves would come back in the darkness and take a terrible revenge for the cruelties they had suffered. But Panama was alarmed quite needlessly: the galley never rode on its waters again.

The first care of the revolted slaves was to get as far away from their late masters as possible. In spite of their fatigue, they rowed hard until daybreak. At first there was some difficulty with the European riff-raff. These wanted to swagger about on deck and bully the Indians; but neither Hernando nor his two English friends would hear of it. They had chosen the able-bodied sailors from amongst the rowers, and placed them on deck to attend to helm and sails. All not wanted for this duty must sit at the oars. Two or three flatly refused to do so, and began to talk above their deserts. They were promptly put back into chains again, and Hernando stood over them with a whip and flogged them into work. The lesson was not lost on the others.

A breeze came up with the sun; sails were spread, sweeps taken in, and the Indians freed from their chains. The delight of the poor fellows was unbounded.

They fell down before their rescuers, worshipping them; then they rushed up on deck, dancing and singing like a mob of children let loose from confinement. There was plenty of excellent food aboard, and for once the rowers fed sumptuously. The breeze continuing, all save the three commanders and the deck hands laid themselves down and slept until nearly noon. Then labour began again. The wind still held strongly, so the natives were put to work cleansing the slave-deck of its accumulated filth. The chains, save about a score of the strongest sets, were tossed overboard. These were kept in case of mutiny amongst the scum whites. There was no fear of trouble with the natives; the faithful, grateful creatures would follow their liberators everywhere.

The cleaning being finished, a council of all the whites—save the three put into bonds—was held on the after-deck. Hernando, as prime mover in the revolt, presided. As the Spaniard was a good seaman, he was unanimously appointed captain; whereupon he chose Morgan, Jeffreys, and a trustworthy Spaniard as his chief officers. Then, before the whole assembly, he swore solemnly to do his utmost for the welfare of his ship; and his three officers, having his promise to issue no orders that a gentleman might hesitate to fulfil, solemnly swore to obey him to the death. The others, according to their several stations, took vows of faithful obedience to their officers.

The captain then proceeded to set matters in order. There were prisoners in the cabins near them; these were brought forth one by one, and examined with commendable fairness. Morgan was surprised at the change in Hernando. He had expected to find him vindictive and cruel, and he knew that not a soul in the fore-part of the galley had been spared in the darkness of the previous night. But liberty had softened the Spaniard; he remembered the injustice he had suffered, not with a view to exacting "eye for eye" and "tooth for tooth" from others, but with the resolve not to inflict injustice upon his fellows. The trials of the prisoners took up the remainder of the day. Some who had been cruel to the slaves were hanged with but little ceremony; it was hardly to be expected that men whose backs still smarted would do otherwise. The two boatswains had perished the night before; the chief boatswain was doomed to share their fate; two others were hanged; the rest were sent below to the slave-deck, and chained to one of the oars, far enough away from the troublesome slaves who were undergoing punishment.

The night passed without alarm. Hernando and Morgan walked the deck for hours in the starlight, planning for the future. They saw the difficulties and

dangers of their position, but could not clearly see a way out of them. They had a ship, well manned and well armed, and fairly well victualled. What should they do with her? Search would be made for them, and galley after galley, ship after ship, coming into Panama, would be sent in quest of them. It they continued in Spanish waters, they must be overtaken at some time or other. What would the result be? They had guns, ammunition, and a fair supply of weapons, but their fighting capacity was very small. The Indians—or most of them—must be at the oars. Out of less than a score of Europeans, some must be about deck duties. A mere handful of men would be left to work the guns and fight. A foe of any strength must inevitably capture them.

Should they attempt to cross the Atlantic to England? There again came the question of capture. Would the Indians remain faithful if any attempt were made to take them thousands of miles from their homes? Should they turn corsairs; capture a sailing ship; set the Indians ashore on their own coast, or leave them the galley to do as they pleased with it? The two men could not make up their minds.

The next day the same thoughts came to the rest of the Europeans, and they were heard discussing their chances of ultimate escape. Another full council was held, and the position placed clearly before them all. There were many differences of opinion, but eventually it was agreed that there was too much danger in remaining near the seaboard of Spanish America, and equal or greater peril to be encountered in an attempt to make a winter passage to Europe. No man would face the voyage round Cape Horn with an inadequate crew and a clumsy galley mainly propelled by oars. The voyage would take nearly a year, and they had provisions for about a fortnight. The plan of capturing a small ship was more favourably considered; but the question arose, Where could such a ship be found? If they got into the ordinary track of navigation, other and less welcome vessels might sight them. The position was distinctly perilous, and a bad feature of it all was that some of the rescued men were thoroughly treacherous and untrustworthy, and others so broken down by years of slavery as to be helpless for strenuous action. The three ringleaders saw plainly that they had less than a dozen men, including themselves, that could be relied upon for loyal, valiant, and intelligent conduct in an emergency. They went to rest that night with no definite plans for the morrow. The galley was kept slowly going northward towards the Pacific coast of Mexico; the oars were little used.

The next morning Hernando took definite steps. He took the captured officers

and the recalcitrant whites, put them into a boat within sight of land, set them adrift, and stood out to sea again. He had none under his command then who were not at least faithful.

For a couple of days he went north, well out to sea. Then he turned inshore again, coasted for a while, until he came to a wooded bay that offered good anchorage. Entering this he dropped his anchor, and went ashore with Morgan and half a dozen or so of the Indians. The party was away for some hours, and only returned at sunset. The next day the object of the expedition was disclosed. Hernando called the whole crew, white and Indian, before him. He explained the dangers they were hourly in on the high seas, and the impossibility of fighting any strong adversary. Food was running short, and a long voyage in the galley was out of the question. He proposed to take to the land himself, and hazard his chance of life and liberty there. The Indians could scatter abroad. The forest teemed with game, and he and his party had seen many streams. No village or town was anywhere in sight. The chances of escape into Mexico were excellent for whites and natives alike. Or any man who wished it might try to reach his own tribe again; a matter of half a moon of marching would bring him to his people. Every man should take some weapon and as much food as he cared to carry. His plan included the burning of the galley, so that all trace of them might be lost.

The natives rejoiced at the chance of quitting the hated galley for their native woods, and the Europeans saw that their captain's plan offered them the best hope of safety; they agreed also.

The *Santa Maria* was partially dismantled. All that was of value in her was taken out; the food was shared, arms distributed, and the whole party went ashore in the boats. Hernando stayed last, and fired the vessel before he left her. During the whole night she blazed, illuminating the camp of her late occupants amid the trees on the shore. The Indians had rigged up two tents with the sails, and in these their white companions slept comfortably.

No move was made from the camping-place on the shore for several days. The Indians scouted round in all directions, going fifty or sixty miles through forest and over mountain, and spying out the land. Hernando, meanwhile, tried to get some idea of his position on the Pacific coast. From his observations, and the reports of the natives, he concluded that he must be somewhere west of the great lake of Nicaragua, and in a line for the small town of San Juan on the

Atlantic coast, not more than a week's march away.

When fairly satisfied of this, he struck his camp, and marched inland over the mountains. The natives carried one boat. In due time they saw a vast stretch of water below them, and knew that the lake lay in their path.

On the shores of the lake the white men had decided to part from their native companions. Villages clustered here and there on the margin of the waters, and the appearance of a large company would spread alarm, and send reports through the land that might betray them all. The leave-taking was pathetic enough. The poor Indians looked like so many helpless children. They begged the white men to stay with them, and settle in the mountains between the lake and the sea. The country was rich, and food and water plentiful. They would be faithful children to their white fathers, if the latter would but stay to guide, protect, and counsel them.

But neither Englishmen nor Spaniards had any desire to rule as petty chiefs in a Central American forest; their thoughts and hopes took higher flights than that. Adieus were said; the Europeans took to their boat, with but one Indian as a scout and possible interpreter, and pulled out from the shore, the mass of natives rushing after them into the water, weeping and lamenting.

The passage of the lake was safely accomplished; the course of a river flowing into it was followed as far as it was navigable. Then the party camped whilst the Indian went to the hilltops in the east, and surveyed the land that sloped away to the coast. He was away about forty hours.

On his return with a favourable report the camp was struck and the boat burned. Then, carefully covering up their tracks, the fugitives set out for the Atlantic coast. It was hardly possible that any report of their escape would have reached so far, and the authorities would never look for them on the eastern ocean.

When the outskirts of San Juan were reached, Hernando went on as advance guard. The next day they all entered the town as a party of shipwrecked sailors. The Englishmen had been rechristened with Spanish names for the nonce, and they wisely left the talking to their Spanish companions. They were received without suspicion.

Chapter L.

HOME.

The Englishmen were doomed to idle about in San Juan for some weeks, and during that time the little money they had found on the *Santa Maria* melted away. Vessels did not enter the little port very often. The Portuguese and Spaniards, save Hernando, found temporary work on neighbouring estates and plantations, and Morgan and his fellows of the *Golden Boar* had plenty of offers of employment; but they preferred to abide together under the wing of Hernando, fearing to betray their nationality by mixing separately and freely with the Spanish settlers. Hernando for his part stuck loyally to them, and none of the others said or did aught to bring suspicion upon their late comrades. The fugitives longed and waited for a ship, hoping to get a passage in her to some place off the mainland. It was by no means an unusual thing for sailors to desert their ship when she touched at a port; some, indeed, undertook a voyage with this end in view, the allurements of the golden tropics proving stronger than any sense of duty.

At length a small ship arrived from Cuba, bringing a consignment of Spanish goods from the depôt at Santiago; she was to take back silver bars for transhipment to Lisbon. Would the skipper give a passage to seven strange sailors whose appearance was not too Spanish? It was doubtful. Yet it turned out that he was only too glad to do so. More than seven of his crew deserted, and went away to the west in search of the silver mines from which the bars had come. Morgan always had a shrewd suspicion that Hernando cleverly engineered the desertion for the sake of his English friends. In any case the desertion took place most opportunely, and the fugitives got the passage they desired. For the sake of appearances both gentlemen adventurers played the part of common sailors. At the last moment Hernando decided to go to Cuba with them. He felt that a few months there would do him good, and help certain keen-eyed people to forget his face. Moreover, he was generously anxious to see the safety of the Englishmen more fully assured.

The season was not the best in the year for sailing, and the voyage to Santiago was a rough one. The new sailors behaved admirably; and though the

captain was more than a little suspicious of their nationality, he said nothing and paid them well. Moreover, he was largely instrumental in getting them a passage to Europe. Hernando's tongue and the talismanic name of Drake did the rest.

The *Donna Philippa* was a galleon of medium class, but well-built and swift-sailing. She was attempting the Atlantic voyage in the winter season, as the authorities preferred to trust her precious cargo to the chances of the storms rather than to the mercies of the English corsairs. These were not abroad on the high seas in the cold season, when ocean traffic was small and tempests frequent; but in the summer time no Spanish captain knew when one of the dreaded craft might appear above the horizon. It is difficult to realize nowadays the terror that Drake and fellow captains—pirates all—had inspired in the breasts of Spanish seamen.

The galleon had not her full complement of crew, for there were some who had come out who were not as favourably disposed towards a winter voyage as was their captain. The latter spoke to the skipper of the coaster concerning his difficulties, and the skipper told him of the men he had picked up at San Juan. He did not hide his suspicions that there was more English than Spanish blood in their veins. He acknowledged that they were splendid sailors; but, being as he believed English deserters, he regarded them as desperate fellows, assuming a gentleness and zealous obedience quite foreign to their nature.

It was here that Hernando stepped in and played his part. No one doubted his nationality; and he, hearing of the shortage of good sailors on the galleon, did his last ingenious act of kindness for his comrades in misfortune. Over a cup of wine in the state-room of the *Donna Philippa* he told a story that did his heart and his wits equal credit. He began it by confirming the skipper's suspicions that his last batch of sailors were English to the very marrow of their bones.

"Yet I love them," he declared, "and would place my life and my father's life in their hands without an instant's hesitation."

Then followed an account of his own shipwreck months before with some other Spanish gentlemen. "We found," said he, "a boat, and coasted with her seeking a harbour. We met the Englishmen, wrecked also. They were a stronger party than we were. They joined us—worked with us for months like brothers. We sailed seas together, fought foes, swam rivers, climbed mountains, threaded forests, shared food, drink, raiment, money—everything. They told us their

story. Two of them, as you may see, are not common sailors, but gentlemen of position, favourites of their Queen, bosom friends and lovers of Drake, Raleigh, Hawkins, Grenville, Whiddon, and all the mighty English captains. They want to get home. Take them as they are. I'll pledge my life they'll serve you faithfully and cheerfully, and they'll *insure your cargo against seizure by their friends*! Mark that; their presence aboard the *Donna Philippa* will assure her the polite and friendly attentions of every English captain on the high seas. See the two gentlemen in my presence, and find out their value for yourself. Were I in your place I should fall down and thank the Mother of God for sending me such help in my hour of need."

The captain of the galleon pondered the matter. Hernando pressed his views upon him, and the skipper of the coaster seconded him. Morgan and Jeffreys were brought aboard. They readily offered themselves as working passengers; expressed themselves as willing to take an oath of fidelity to the captain if he would take another one to them; and assured him that no English captain would rob him of a jot of his cargo, or treat him other than as a friend and brother, whilst they were with him to tell of his kindness to them.

The bargain was struck. Morgan, Jeffreys, and the five sailors were duly entered on the ship's books, owning to the Spanish names bestowed on them by Hernando. The two gentlemen went as passengers, with a sailor each as servant; the other three took their places amongst the crew. Two of them had been long enough in the galleys to speak Spanish as well as they spoke their mother tongue. They cleared Santiago safely towards the end of January.

The *Donna Philippa* was called upon to pay some penalty for her rashness in crossing the Atlantic in winter. Again and again did the tempests strike her, shattering some of her timbers, swamping her with terrific seas, and driving her for days out of her proper course. It is probable that the greater skill of her English sailors and passengers alone saved her from destruction. They were more accustomed to the stormy northern seas than were their Spanish comrades, and they set an example of cool courage and endurance that saved the galleon from worse disasters than those that actually befell her. If he met no English corsairs, the Spanish captain had reason to congratulate himself on his wisdom in accepting Hernando's advice in Santiago. Needless to say, the ship was never becalmed, and the howling winds that drove her out of her way would often moderate, turn round, and send her bowling homewards. The skipper hoped to make the Azores as his first land, but a south-westerly wind springing up in early

March and continuing for some days, he held on direct for Lisbon. So far no human enemy had molested him.

The ship was nearing the coast of Portugal, and the sailors were expecting to sight land on the morrow. March was half-way through, the sun warm by day and the breezes often southerly and genial. Morgan and Jeffreys were wondering what might befall them in the realms of King Philip, and how they should get ship from there to England. They had but little money, as the captain had treated them as guests of gentle birth, paying with food the services they could render him. Spain was dangerous ground for English feet, and no foreign land could well be pleasant to a set of penniless men. The prospect was not alluring.

Now and again sails appeared above the horizon, and after weary watching Jeffreys espied one that he declared to be English. The vessel was coming up from the south, and the *Donna Philippa* was steering almost due east. At a certain point their paths would cross. The two Englishmen went to the captain and called his attention to this, and asked him to shape his course so as to meet the oncoming boat, and put them aboard if she chanced to be English.

The skipper demurred at first. His cargo was precious, but safe; he was almost in sight of home. Why should he run risks? The adventurers assured him that there could be no risk. The stranger vessel was a small one; if any other than English, she would never dare to fight a ship of the tonnage of the *Donna Philippa*; and if English, they would guarantee that not a blow should be struck. After much persuasion the captain consented.

The little ship was hailed, and proved to be a Canary trader bound for Bristol. Morgan went aboard and explained matters, and the captain gladly consented to receive them and give them a passage home. So, to the surprise of the crew of the galleon, the men were transhipped a day's sail from harbour.

Ten days later the trader dropped anchor in the Avon. Morgan went to the mayor of the city, saw him privately, and explained who he was, and what had befallen him and his comrades. His worship listened to the story, and advanced the adventurer money to take him and his friends to their homes. The next day the seven, with handshakes, kisses, even tears, separated and went their several ways.

Chapter LI.

THE FOREST AGAIN—AND THE SEA.

Johnnie Morgan had tramped up from Bristol to Berkeley, and now stood on the Severn bank at the eastern end of the ferry to Gatcombe and the snug ingle-corner of the old farmhouse. Such a crowd of thoughts, hopes, dreads, rushed into his mind that the whirl and jostle of them in his brain made him giddy. He had left Bristol at dawn; it was now late afternoon and an April day. He had entered the "Berkeley Arms" in the old feudal town, called for his ale, and been stared at by an old crony, yet never recognized. A year of absence, danger, privation, slavery had put five years at least on to the young yeoman's back. The laughter had gone out of his eyes, the roundness out of his cheeks, and his walk was stiff.

He hailed the ferryman. The man came slowly across from Gatcombe. Johnnie recognized his stroke before he clearly detected the body from the boat. Here was the real touch of home. Old Evan would stare at him, doubtless, but only for a moment. Then would come the affectionate cry, "Plague take me! if it b'aint Jack Morgan. Welcome home, my son; we'd given thee up for dead!"

The ferryman came; his fare stepped in. The ferryman stared not once nor twice, but apparently he gave up the puzzle that troubled his mind, for he took the ha'penny fare with no other remark than that the day had been very warm for the time o' year. Johnnie went up the hill feeling very depressed. On a sudden impulse he turned aside from the highroad and took the path by the river through the fields to his own lands. He felt he could not bear another familiar face to look into his and not give him an old-time affectionate greeting. He tried to persuade himself that the light was getting weak, but looking around he could distinguish small objects on the other side of the river, and he recognized old Biddy Gale coming down to the well at the bottom of her garden to draw water.

The red roofs of Blakeney showed up against the dark background of the trees. He looked for his own house. No smoke curled from the chimneys. His heart seemed suddenly to turn to a lump of lead. An urchin was coming along the path; he determined to talk to him.

The boy came whistling along, spied the tall, gaunt, bearded stranger, and ceased his piping. When Johnnie turned towards him he made as though to bolt, but thought better of it and came on.

"Is yonder place Blakeney?" asked the young man.

"It is," was the reply.

"Doth one Master John Morgan live there?"

"A-did in the time past, good master; but, preserve us from evil! the Spaniards roasted and eat him somewhere in the Indies."

A faint smile flickered across Johnnie's face. "How sad!" he cried. "Who then lives in his house yonder?"

"Just a widow woman and her maid. They will not quit, they say, until a twelvemonth and a day be gone by from the time the rascal Dons laid hands on their master. They will have it that he will come back; and Mistress Dawe of Newnham, and a sailor-man named Dan of Plymouth, do hold with them."

Johnnie wanted to ask a question about Dolly, but the words would not come. The lad relieved him by continuing to unload his budget of information.

"The sailor-man be lodged at the farm, much against the widow's wish—so she says; but he declares he will not budge, lest Master Morgan should come home and find never the face of an old shipmate to cheer him." (The smile flickered across Johnnie's face again.) "Mistress Dawe be now at the house, if thou art minded to walk thither. She comes there at times and stays for two or three days. Folks do say that she expects John Morgan to walk in some evening. They were lovers, ye know."

"Ah!" said Johnnie, with a catch in his breath.

"Yon's the house, behind the hayricks. Fine harvest Master Morgan had last year. All the lads in this part of the forest looked after his fields in turns. I helped to get in his hay and corn, and the widow gave a harvest home just as the master would have done."

"Didst know this Morgan, sonnie?"

"Ay, I do mind him well. Thou dost favour him somewhat, only he was a taller and properer man and had no beard."

"Well, I'll go to the house; here's a penny for thee. Tell thy father that a tall man who hath been in the Indies hath been asking for Master Morgan."

Johnnie walked on, his heart beating to the rhythm, "Dolly is there! Dolly is there!" He jumped a stile. His own fields! He looked around; no one was in sight, so he pressed his lips to the turf, then whispered a quick, passionate prayer. Rising up again, eyes wet, knees trembling, he walked on.

He had turned up the path from the river; his orchard was before him. He turned to look behind at the rushing stream and the gulls circling in the rays of the setting sun. There was a flutter of white at the river-stile. His heart stood still. Could it be? No!—Was it?—Yes! He started riverwards at a run; then stopped; hesitated; walked soberly on.

The flutter of white again from the shadow of the hedge; the figure of a girl, bonnetless, her hair gently lifting with the breeze, stood out clear and unmistakable. He stopped. The maid stepped a little forward and shaded her eyes with her hand. With an uncontrollable impulse his arms stretched out.

"Dolly!"

A cry from the stile. A girl sprang forward, raced up the field, and threw herself into his arms. "Johnnie! Johnnie! Thank God! thank God! I dreamt you would come back and find me where we last met, just like this!"

The next day the forest rang with the news that Johnnie Morgan was home again, and foresters, miners, and fishers made so merry over the event that Johnnie thought it worth while to have gone through so much in order to give them such a jubilant time.

Three weeks afterwards the maidens chose pretty Dolly as "Queen of May," and when she was crowned they led her to the church above the river—all in her garlands gay—and there a tall, sun-browned youth took her "for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer," till death should part them. And there were rare junketings and feastings to celebrate the union of the two woodland favourites.

Johnnie abode at home for one year. Then he was tempted to go again to London, and from thence he went by sea to Plymouth. There he met the admiral, his brother John, Jacob Whiddon, Sir John Trelawny, and other sea-going worthies, and there was much talk concerning the Indies.

Johnnie came home, and one night he said to his wife Dorothy, "I have been thinking that I left some honour behind me on the other side of the world. Master Jeffreys sends me a letter this morning, and Sir Walter hath written a postscript to it. I cannot forget what was done at Panama, and there are some who should suffer for the cruelties done to Nick and Ned Johnson and others who sailed on the *Golden Boar*. The ship is fitting for another voyage, and I have still an interest in her. What dost say, sweetheart? thou knowest the thoughts that are in my mind."

Well, Mistress Morgan said nothing that night, but she wept a little and sighed oft. But the next day she said "Go, husband, and God go with thee!"

So the *Golden Boar* went westward ho! again, and Dan Pengelly and all her old company that were above ground went in her. And Captain Jacob Whiddon went too, in a second ship called the *Elizabeth*. There was no wild-goose chase this time after golden cities that could not be found. But the Englishmen harried the Spanish settlements along the South American coast and in the Mexican Gulf, and preyed upon King Philip's shipping. They sent an expedition two hundred strong across to Panama and raided the town, daringly marching back to the Atlantic with no man presuming to stop them.

They came home to Plymouth laden with spoil, gotten mainly by piracy and the breaking of the laws of nations. But their countrymen acclaimed them to the skies, holding them to be no robbers, but heroes and patriots all!

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