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BY ENGLAND'S AID

OR THE FREEING OF THE NETHERLANDS

G. A. HENTY

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GEOFFREY AND LIONEL SAVE FRANCIS VERE'S LIFE.

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BY ENGLAND'S AID:

OR,

THE FREEING OF THE NETHERLANDS.

(1585 – 1604).

BY

G. A. HENTY,

Author of "By Pike and Dyke;" "The Lion of St. Mark;" "Maori and Settler;"
"Bonnie Prince Charlie;" "For the Temple;" &c.

WITH TEN PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALFRED PEARSE,
AND FOUR MAPS.

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PREFACE.

MY DEAR LADS,

In my preface to *By Pike and Dyke* I promised in a future story to deal with the closing events of the War of Independence in Holland. The period over which that war extended was so long, and the incidents were so numerous and varied, that it was impossible to include the whole within the limit of a single book. The former volume brought the story of the struggle down to the death of the Prince of Orange and the capture of Antwerp; the present gives the second phase of the war, when England, who had long unofficially assisted Holland, threw herself openly into the struggle, and by her aid mainly contributed to the successful issue of the war. In the first part of the struggle the scene lay wholly among the low lands and cities of Holland and Zeeland, and the war was strictly a defensive one, waged against overpowering odds. After England threw herself into the strife it assumed far wider proportions, and the independence of the Netherlands was mainly secured by the defeat and destruction of the great Armada, by the capture of Cadiz and the fatal blow thereby struck at the mercantile prosperity of Spain, and by the defeat of the Holy League by Henry of Navarre, aided by English soldiers and English gold. For the facts connected with the doings of Sir Francis Vere and the British contingent in Holland, I have depended much upon the excellent work by Mr. Clement Markham entitled the *Fighting Veres*. In this full justice is done to the great English general and his followers, and it

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is conclusively shown that some statements to the disparagement of Sir Francis Vere by Mr. Motley are founded upon a misconception of the facts. Sir Francis Vere was, in the general opinion of the time, one of the greatest commanders of the age, and more, perhaps, than any other man—with the exception of the Prince of Orange—contributed to the successful issue of the struggle of Holland to throw off the yoke of Spain.

Yours sincerely,

G. A. HENTY.

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BY ENGLAND'S AID:

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CHAPTER I.

AN EXCURSION.

AND we beseech Thee, O Lord, to give help and succour to thy servants the people of Holland, and to deliver them from the cruelties and persecutions of their wicked oppressors; and grant Thy blessing, we pray Thee, upon the arms of our soldiers now embarking to aid them in their extremity." These were the words with which the Rev. John Vickars, rector of Hedingham, concluded the family prayers on the morning of December 6th, 1585.

For twenty years the first portion of this prayer had been repeated daily by him, as it had been in tens of thousands of English households; for since the people of the Netherlands first rose against the Spanish yoke the hearts of the Protestants of England had beat warmly in their cause, and they had by turns been moved to admiration at the indomitable courage with which the Dutch struggled for independence against the might of the greatest power in Europe, and to horror and indignation at the pitiless cruelty and wholesale massacres by which the Spaniards had striven to stamp out resistance.

From the first the people of England would gladly have

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joined in the fray, and made common cause with their co-religionists; but the queen and her counsellors had been restrained by weighty considerations from embarking in such a struggle. At the commencement of the war the power of Spain overshadowed all Europe. Her infantry were regarded as irresistible. Italy and Germany were virtually her dependencies, and England was but a petty power beside her. Since Agincourt was fought we had taken but little part in wars on the Continent. The feudal system was extinct; we had neither army nor military system; and the only Englishmen with the slightest experience of war were those who had gone abroad to seek their fortunes, and had fought in the armies of one or other of the continental powers. Nor were we yet aware of our naval strength. Drake and Hawkins and the other buccaneers had not yet commenced their private war with Spain, on what was known as the Spanish main—the waters of the West Indian Islands—and no one dreamed that the time was approaching when England would be able to hold her own against the strength of Spain on the seas.

Thus, then, whatever the private sentiments of Elizabeth and her counsellors, they shrank from engaging England in a life and death struggle with the greatest power of the time; though as the struggle went on the queen's sympathy with the people of the Netherlands was more and more openly shown. In 1572 she was present at a parade of three hundred volunteers who mustered at Greenwich under Thomas Morgan and Roger Williams for service in the Netherlands. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, half-brother of Sir Walter Raleigh, went out a few months later with 1500 men, and from that time numbers of English volunteers continued to cross the seas and join in the struggle against the Spaniards. Nor were the sympathies of the queen confined to allowing her subjects to take part in the fighting; for she sent out large sums of money to the Dutch,

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and as far as she could, without openly joining them, gave them her aid.

Spain remonstrated continually against these breaches of neutrality, while the Dutch on their part constantly implored her to join them openly; but she continued to give evasive answers to both parties until the assassination of William of Orange on 10th July, 1584, sent a thrill of horror through England, and determined the queen and her advisers to take a more decisive part in the struggle. In the following June envoys from the States arrived in London, and were received with great honour, and a treaty between the two countries was agreed upon. Three months later the queen published a declaration to her people and to Europe at large, setting forth the terrible persecutions and cruelties to which "our next neighbours, the people of the Low Countries," the special allies and friends of England, had been exposed, and stating her determination to aid them to recover their liberty. The proclamation concluded: "We mean not hereby to make particular profit to ourself and our people, only desiring to obtain, by God's favour, for the Countries, a deliverance of them from war by the Spaniards and foreigners, with a restitution of their ancient liberties and government."

Sir Thomas Cecil was sent out at once as governor of Brill, and Sir Philip Sidney as governor of Flushing, these towns being handed over to England as guarantees by the Dutch. These two officers, with bodies of troops to serve as garrisons, took charge of their respective fortresses in November. Orders were issued for the raising of an army for service in the Low Countries, and Dudley, Earl of Leicester, was appointed by the queen to its command. The decision of the queen was received with enthusiasm in England as well as in Holland, and although the Earl of Leicester was not personally popular, volunteers flocked to his standard.

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Breakfast at Hedingham Rectory had been set at an earlier hour than usual on the 6th of December, 1585. There was an unusual stir and excitement in the village, for young Mr. Francis Vere, cousin of the Earl of Oxford, lord of Hedingham and of all the surrounding country, was to start that morning to ride to Colchester, there to join the Earl of Leicester and his following as a volunteer. As soon as breakfast was over young Geoffrey and Lionel Vickars, boys of fourteen and thirteen years old, proceeded to the castle close by, and there mounted the horses provided for them, and rode with Francis Vere to Colchester.

Francis, who was at this time twenty-five years old, was accompanied by his elder brother, John, and his two younger brothers, Robert and Horace, and by many other friends; and it was a gay train that cantered down the valley of the Colne to Colchester. That ancient town was all astir. Gentlemen had ridden in from all the country seats and manors for many miles round, and the quiet streets were alive with people. At two o'clock in the afternoon news arrived that the earl was approaching, and, headed by the bailiffs of the town in scarlet gowns, the multitude moved out to meet the earl on the Lexden road. Presently a long train was seen approaching; for with Leicester were the Earl of Essex, Lords North and Audley, Sir William Russell, Sir Thomas Shirley, and other volunteers, to the number of five hundred horse. All were gaily attired and caparisoned, and the cortège presented a most brilliant appearance. The multitude cheered lustily, the bailiffs presented an address, and followed by his own train and by the gentlemen who had assembled to meet him, the earl rode into the town. He himself took up his abode at the house of Sir Thomas Lucas, while his followers were distributed among the houses of the townsfolk. Two hours after the arrival of the earl, the party from Hedingham took leave of Mr. Francis Vere.

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"Good-bye, lads," he said to the young Vickars. "I will keep my promise, never fear; and if the struggle goes on till you are old enough to carry arms, I will, if I am still alive, take you under my leading and teach you the art of war."

Upon the following day the Earl of Leicester and his following rode to Manningtree, and took boat down the Stour to Harwich, where the fleet, under Admiral William Borough, was lying. Here they embarked, and on the 9th of December sailed for Flushing, where they were joined by another fleet of sixty ships from the Thames.

More than a year passed. The English had fought sturdily in Holland. Mr. Francis Vere had been with his cousin, Lord Willoughby, who was in command of Bergen-op-Zoom, and had taken part in the first brush with the enemy, when a party of the garrison marched out and attacked a great convoy of four hundred and fifty waggons going to Antwerp, killed three hundred of the enemy, took eighty prisoners, and destroyed all their waggons except twenty-seven, which they carried into the town. Leicester provisioned the town of Grave, which was besieged by the Duke of Parma, the Spanish commander-in-chief. Axel was captured by surprise, the volunteers swimming across the moat at night, and throwing open the gates. Doesburg was captured, and Zutphen besieged.

Parma marched to its relief, and, under cover of a thick fog, succeeded in getting close at hand before it was known that he was near. Then the English knights and volunteers, 200 in number, mounted in hot haste and charged a great Spanish column of 5000 horse and foot. They were led by Sir William Russell, under whom were Lords Essex, North, Audley, and Willoughby, behind the last of whom rode Francis Vere. For two hours this little band of horse fought desperately in the midst of the Spanish cavalry, and forced them at last to fall back, but were themselves obliged to retreat when the Spanish

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infantry came up and opened fire upon them. The English loss was 34 killed and wounded, while 250 of the Spaniards were slain, and three of their colours captured. Among the wounded on the English side was the very noble knight Sir Philip Sidney, who was shot by a musket-ball, and died three weeks afterwards.

The successes of the English during these two years were counterbalanced by the cowardly surrender of Grave by its governor, and by the treachery of Sir William Stanley, governor of Deventer, and of Roland Yorke, who commanded the garrisons of the two forts known as the Zutphen Sconces. Both these officers turned traitors and delivered up the posts they commanded to the Spaniards. Their conduct not only caused great material loss to the allies, but it gave rise to much bad feeling between the English and Dutch, the latter complaining that they received but half-hearted assistance from the English.

It was not surprising, however, that Leicester was unable to effect more with the little force under his command, for it was necessary not only to raise soldiers, but to invent regulations and discipline. The Spanish system was adopted, and this, the first English regular army, was trained and appointed precisely upon the system of the foe with whom they were fighting. It was no easy task to convert a body of brave knights and gentlemen and sturdy country men into regular troops, and to give them the advantages conferred by discipline and order. But the work was rendered the less difficult by the admixture of the volunteers who had been bravely fighting for ten years under Morgan, Rowland Williams, John Norris, and others. These had had a similar experience on their first arrival in Holland. Several times in their early encounters with the Spaniards the undisciplined young troops had behaved badly; but they had gained experience from their reverses, and had

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proved themselves fully capable of standing in line even against the splendid pikemen of Spain.

While the English had been drilling and fighting in Holland things had gone on quietly at Hedingham. The village stands near the head waters of the Colne and Stour, in a rich and beautiful country. On a rising ground behind it stood the castle of the Veres, which was approached from the village by a drawbridge across the moat. There were few more stately piles in England than the seat of the Earl of Oxford. On one side of the great quadrangle was the gate-house and a lofty tower, on another the great hall and chapel and the kitchens, on a third the suites of apartments of the officials and retinue. In rear were the stables and granaries, the butts and tennis-court, beyond which was the court of the tournaments.

In the centre of the quadrangle rose the great keep, which still stands, the finest relic of Norman civil architecture in England. It possessed great strength, and at the same time was richly ornamented with carving. The windows, arches, and fireplaces were decorated with chevron carvings. A beautiful spiral pattern enriched the doorway and pillars of the staircase leading to galleries cut in the thickness of the wall, with arched openings looking into the hall below. The outlook from the keep extended over the parishes of Castle Hedingham, Sybil Hedingham, Kirby, and Tilbury, all belonging to the Veres—whose property extended far down the pretty valley of the Stour—with the stately Hall of Long Melford, the Priory of Clare, and the little town of Lavenham; indeed the whole country was dotted with the farmhouses and manors of the Veres. Seven miles down the valley of the Colne lies the village of Earl's Colne, with the priory, where ten of the earls of Oxford lie buried with their wives.

The parish church of Castle Hedingham stood at the end of the little village street, and the rectory of Mr. Vickars was

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close by. The party gathered at morning prayers consisted of Mr. Vickars and his wife, their two sons, Geoffrey and Lionel, and the maid-servants, Ruth and Alice. The boys, now fourteen and fifteen years old respectively, were strong-grown and sturdy lads, and their father had long since owned with a sigh that neither of them was likely to follow his profession and fill the pulpit at Hedingham Church when he was gone. Nor was this to be wondered at, for lying as it did at the entrance to the great castle of the Veres, the street of the little village was constantly full of armed men, and resounded with the tramp of the horses of richly-dressed knights and gay ladies.

Here came great politicians, who sought the friendship and support of the powerful earls of Oxford, nobles and knights, their kinsmen and allies, gentlemen from the wide-spreading manors of the family, stout fighting-men who wished to enlist under their banner. At night the sound of music from the castle told of gay entertainments and festive dances, while by day parties of knights and ladies with dogs and falcons sallied out to seek sport over the wide domains. It could hardly be expected, then, that lads of spirit, brought up in the midst of sights and sounds like these, should entertain a thought of settling down to the tranquil life of the church. As long as they could remember, their minds had been fixed upon being soldiers, and fighting some day under the banner of the Veres. They had been a good deal in the castle; for Mr. Vickars had assisted Arthur Golding, the learned instructor to young Edward Vere, the 17th earl, who was born in 1550, and had succeeded to the title at the age of twelve, and he had afterwards been tutor to the earl's cousins, John, Francis, Robert, and Horace, the sons of Geoffrey, fourth son of the 15th earl. These boys were born in 1558, 1560, 1562, and 1565, and lived with their mother at Kirby Hall, a mile from the Castle of Hedingham.

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The earl was much attached to his old instructor, and when he was at the castle there was scarce a day but an invitation came down for Mr. Vickars and his wife to be present either at banquet or entertainment. The boys were free to come and go as they chose, and the earl's men-at-arms had orders to afford them all necessary teaching in the use of weapons.

Mr. Vickars considered it his duty to accept the invitations of his friend and patron, but he sorely grudged the time so abstracted from his favourite books. It was, indeed, a relief to him when the earl, whose love of profusion and luxury made serious inroads even into the splendid possessions of the Veres, went up to court, and peace and quietness reigned in the castle. The rector was fonder of going to Kirby, where John, Geoffrey's eldest son, lived quietly and soberly, his three younger brothers having, when mere boys, embraced the profession of arms, placing themselves under the care of the good soldier Sir William Browne, who had served for many years in the Low Countries. They occasionally returned home for a time, and were pleased to take notice of the sons of their old tutor, although Geoffrey was six years junior to Horace, the youngest of the brothers.

The young Vickars had much time to themselves, much more indeed than their mother considered to be good for them. After their breakfast, which was finished by eight o'clock, their father took them for an hour and heard the lessons they had prepared the day before, and gave them instruction in the Latin tongue. Then they were supposed to study till the bell rang for dinner at twelve; but there was no one to see that they did so, for their father seldom came outside his library door, and their mother was busy with her domestic duties and in dispensing simples to the poor people, who, now that the monasteries were closed, had no medical aid save that which they got from the wives of the gentry or ministers, or from the

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wise women, of whom there was generally one in every village.

Therefore, after half an hour, or at most an hour, spent in getting up their tasks, the books would be thrown aside, and the boys be off, either to the river or up to the castle to practise sword-play with the men-at-arms, or to the butts with their bows, or to the rabbit-warren, where they had leave from the earl to go with their dogs whenever they pleased. Their long excursions were, however, generally deferred until after dinner, as they were then free until supper-time, and even if they did not return after that hour Mrs. Vickars did not chide them unduly, being an easy-going woman, and always ready to make excuses for them.

There were plenty of fish in the river; and the boys knew the pools they loved best, and often returned with their baskets well filled. There were otters on its banks, too; but, though they sometimes chased these pretty creatures, Tan and Turk, their two dogs, knew as well as their masters that they had but small chance of catching them. Sometimes they would take a boat at the bridge and drop down the stream for miles, and once or twice had even gone down to Bricklesey[1] at the mouth of the river. This, however, was an expedition that they never performed alone, making it each time in charge of Master Lirriper, who owned a flat barge, and took produce down to Bricklesey, there to be transhipped into coasters bound for London. He had a married daughter there, and it was at her house the boys had slept when they went there; for the journey down and up again was too long to be performed in a single day.

But this was not the only distant expedition they had made, for they had once gone down the Stour as far as Harwich with their father when he was called thither on business. To them

[1] Now Brightlingsea.

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Harwich with its old walls and the houses crowded up within them, and its busy port with vessels coming in and going out, was most delightful, and they always talked about that expedition as one of the most pleasant recollections of their lives.

After breakfast was over on 1st of May, 1587, and they had done their lessons with their father, and had worked for an hour by themselves, the boys put by their books and strolled down the village to the bridge. There as usual stood their friend Master Lirriper with his hands deep in his pockets, a place and position in which he was sure to be found when not away in his barge.

"Good-morning, Master Lirriper."

"Good-morning, Master Geoffrey and Master Lionel."

"So you are not down the river to-day?"

"No, sir. I am going to-morrow, and this time I shall be away four or five days—maybe even a week."

"Shall you?" the boys exclaimed in surprise. "Why, what are you going to do?"

"I am going round to London in my nephew Joe Chambers' craft."

"Are you really?" Geoffrey exclaimed. "I wish we were going with you. Don't you think you could take us, Master Lirriper?"

The bargeman looked down into the water and frowned. He was slow of speech, but as the minutes went on and he did not absolutely refuse the boys exchanged glances of excitement and hope.

"I dunno how that might be, young sirs," John Lirriper said slowly, after long cogitation. "I dus-say my nephew would have no objection, but what would parson say about it?"

"Oh, I don't think he would object," Geoffrey said. "If you go up and ask him, Master Lirriper, and say that you will take care of us, you know, I don't see why he should say no."

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"Like enough you would be ill," John Lirriper said after another long pause. "It's pretty rough sometimes."

"Oh, we shouldn't mind that," Lionel protested. "We should like to see the waves and to be in a real ship."

"It's nothing much of a ship," the boatman said. "She is a ketch of about ten tons and carries three hands."

"Oh, we don't care how small she is if we can only go in her; and you would be able to show us London, and we might even see the queen. Oh, do come up with us and ask father, Master Lirriper."

"Perhaps parson wouldn't be pleased, young sirs, and might say I was putting wandering thoughts into your heads; and Mistress Vickars might think it a great liberty on my part."

"Oh, no, she wouldn't, Master Lirriper. Besides, we will say we asked you."

"But suppose any harm comes to you, what would they say to me then?"

"Oh, there's no fear of any harm coming to us. Besides, in another year or two we mean to go over to the Low Countries and fight the Spaniards, and what's a voyage to London to that?"

"Well, I will think about it," John Lirriper said cautiously.

"No no, Master Lirriper; if you get thinking about it it will never be done. Do come up with us at once," and each of them got hold of one of the boatman's arms.

"Well, the parson can but say no," he said, as he suffered himself to be dragged away. "And I don't say as it isn't reasonable that you should like to see something of the world, young sirs; but I don't know how the parson will take it."

Mr. Vickars looked up irritably from his books when the servant came in and said that Master Lirriper wished to see him.

"What does he want at this hour?" he said. "You know,

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Ruth, I never see people before dinner. Any time between that and supper I am at their service, but it's too bad being disturbed now."

"I told him so, sir; but Master Geoffrey and Master Lionel were with him, and they said he wanted particular to see you, and they wanted particular too."

The clergyman sighed as he put his book down.

"If Geoffrey and Lionel have concerned themselves in the matter, Ruth, I suppose I must see the man; but it's very hard being disturbed like this. Well, Master Lirriper, what is it?" he asked, as the boatman accompanied by Geoffrey and Lionel entered the room. Master Lirriper twirled his hat in his hand. Words did not come easily to him at the best of times, and this was a business that demanded thought and care. Long before he had time to fix upon an appropriate form of words Geoffrey broke in:

"This is what it is, father. Master Lirriper is going down the river to Bricklesey to-morrow, and then he is going on board his nephew's ship. She is a ketch, and she carries ten tons, though I don't know what it is she carries; and she's going to London, and he is going in her, and he says if you will let him he will take us with him, and will show us London, and take great care of us. It will be glorious, father, if you will only let us go."

Mr. Vickars looked blankly as Geoffrey poured out his torrent of words. His mind was still full of the book he had been reading, and he hardly took in the meaning of Geoffrey's words.

"Going in a ketch!" he repeated. "Going to catch something, I suppose you mean? Do you mean he is going fishing?"

"No, father,—going in a ketch. A ketch is a sort of ship, father, though I don't quite know what sort of ship. What sort of ship is a ketch, Master Lirriper?"

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"A ketch is a two-masted craft, Master Geoffrey," John Lirriper said. "She carries a big mizzen sail."

"There, you see, father," Geoffrey said triumphantly; "she carries a big mizzen sail. That's what she is, you see; and he is going to show us London, and will take great care of us if you will let us go with him."

"Do you mean, Master Lirriper," Mr. Vickars asked slowly, "that you are going to London in some sort of ship, and want to take my sons with you?"

"Well, sir, I am going to London, and the young masters seemed to think that they would like to go with me, if so be you would have no objection."

"I don't know," Mr. Vicars said. "It is a long passage, Master Lirriper; and, as I have heard, often a stormy one. I don't think my wife—"

"Oh, yes, father," Lionel broke in. "If you say yes, mother is sure to say yes; she always does, you know. And, you see, it will be a great thing for us to see London. Every one else seems to have seen London, and I am sure that it would do us good. And we might even see the queen."

"I think that they would be comfortable, sir," John Lirriper put in. "You see, my nephew's wife is daughter of a citizen, one Master Swindon, a ship's chandler, and he said there would be a room there for me, and they would make me heartily welcome. Now, you see, sir, the young masters could have that room, and I could very well sleep on board the ketch; and they would be out of all sort of mischief there."

"That would be a very good plan certainly, Master Lirriper. Well, well, I don't know what to say."

"Say yes, father," Geoffrey said as he saw Mr. Vickars glance anxiously at the book he had left open. "If you say yes, you see it will be a grand thing for you, our being away for a week with nothing to disturb you."

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"Well, well," Mr. Vickars said, "you must ask your mother. If she makes no objection, then I suppose you can go," and Mr. Vickars hastily took up his book again.

The boys ran off to the kitchen, where their mother was superintending the brewing of some broth for a sick woman down the village.

"Mother!" Geoffrey exclaimed, "Master Lirriper's going to London in a ketch—a ship with a big mizzen sail, you know—and he has offered to take us with him and show us London. And father has said yes, and it's all settled if you have no objection; and of course you haven't."

"Going to London, Geoffrey!" Mrs. Vicars exclaimed aghast. "I never heard of such a thing. Why, like enough you will be drowned on the way and never come back again. Your father must be mad to think of such a thing."

"Oh, no, mother; I am sure it will do us a lot of good. And we may see the queen, mother. And as for drowning, why, we can both swim ever so far. Besides, people don't get drowned going to London. Do they Master Lirriper?"

John was standing bashfully at the door of the kitchen. "Well, not as a rule, Master Geoffrey," he replied. "They comes and they goes, them that are used to it, maybe a hundred times without anything happening to them."

"There! You hear that, mother? They come and go hundreds of times. Oh, I am sure you are not going to say no. That would be too bad when father has agreed to it. Now, mother, please tell Ruth to run away at once and get a wallet packed with our things. Of course we shall want our best clothes; because people dress finely in London, and it would never do if we saw the queen and we hadn't our best doublets on, for she would think that we didn't know what was seemly down at Hedingham."

"Well, my dears, of course if it is all settled—"

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"Oh, yes, mother, it is quite all settled."

"Then it's no use my saying anything more about it, but I think your father might have consulted me before he gave his consent to your going on such a hazardous journey as this.

"He did want to consult you, mother. But then, you see, he wanted to consult his books even more, and he knew very well that you would agree with him; and you know you would too. So please don't say anything more about it, but let Ruth run upstairs and see to our things at once. There, you see, Master Lirriper, it is all settled. And what time do you start to-morrow? We will be there half an hour before, anyhow."

"I shall go at seven from the bridge. Then I shall just catch the turn of the tide and get to Bricklesey in good time."

"I never did see such boys," Mrs. Vickars said when John Lirriper had gone on his way. "As for your father, I am surprised at him in countenancing you. You will be running all sorts of risks. You may be drowned on the way, or killed in a street brawl, or get mixed up in a plot. There is no saying what may not happen. And here it is all settled before I have even time to think about it, which is most inconsiderate of your father."

"Oh, we shall get back again without any harm, mother. And as to getting killed in a street brawl, Lionel and I can use our hangers as well as most of them. Besides, nothing of that sort is going to happen to us. Now, mother, please let Ruth go at once, and tell her to put up our puce doublets that we had for the jousting at the castle, and our red hose and our dark green cloth slashed trunks."

"There is plenty of time for that, Geoffrey, as you are not going until to-morrow. Besides, I can't spare Ruth now, but she shall see about it after dinner."

There was little sleep for the boys that night. A visit to London had long been one of their wildest ambitions, and they

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could scarcely believe that thus suddenly and without preparation it was about to take place. Their father had some time before promised that he would some day make request to one or other of the young Veres to allow them to ride to London in his suite, but the present seemed to them an even more delightful plan. There would be the pleasure of the voyage, and moreover it would be much more lively for them to be able to see London under the charge of John Lirriper than to be subject to the ceremonial and restraint that would be enforced in the household of the Veres. They were then at the appointed place a full hour before the time named, with wallets containing their clothes, and a basket of provisions that their mother had prepared for them. Having stowed these away in the little cabin, they walked up and down impatiently until Master Lirriper himself appeared.

"You are up betimes, my young masters," the boatman said. "The church has not yet struck seven o'clock."

"We have been here ever so long, Master Lirriper. We could not sleep much last night, and got up when it chimed five, being afraid that we might drop off to sleep and be late."

"Well, we shall not be long before we are off. Here comes my man Dick, and the tide is just on the turn. The sky looks bright, and the weather promises well. I will just go round to the cottage and fetch up my things, and then we shall be ready."

In ten minutes they pushed off from the shore. John and his man got out long poles shod with iron, and with these set to work to punt the barge along. Now that they were fairly on their way the boys quieted down, and took their seats on the sacks of flour with which the boat was laden, and watched the objects on the bank as the boat made her way quietly along.

Halstead was the first place passed. This was the largest

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town near Hedingham, and was a place of much importance in their eyes. Then they passed Stanstead Hall and Earl's Colne on their right, Colne Wake on their left, and Chapel Parish on their right. Then there was a long stretch without any large villages, until they came in sight of the bridge above Colchester. A few miles below the town the river began to widen. The banks were low and flat, and they were now entering an arm of the sea. Half an hour later the houses and church of Bricklesey came in sight. Tide was almost low when they ran on to the mud abreast of the village, but John put on a pair of high boots and carried the boys ashore one after the other on his back, and then went up with them to the house where they were to stop for the night.

Here, although not expected, they were heartily welcomed by John's daughter.

"If father had told me that you had been coming, Masters Vickars, I would have had a proper dinner for you; but though he sent word yesterday morning that he should be over to-day, he did not say a word about your coming with them."

"He did not know himself," Geoffrey said; "it was only settled at ten o'clock yesterday. But do not trouble yourself about the dinner. In the first place, we are so pleased at going that we don't care a bit what we eat, and in the second place we had breakfast on board the boat, and we were both so hungry that I am sure we could go till supper-time without eating if necessary."

"Where are you going, father?" the young woman asked.

"I am going to set about unloading the flour."

"Why, it's only a quarter to twelve, and dinner just ready. The fish went into the frying-pan as you came up from the boat. You know we generally dine at half-past eleven, but we saw you coming at a distance and put it off. It's no use your starting now."

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"Well, I suppose it isn't. And I don't know what the young masters' appetite may be, but mine is pretty good, I can tell you."

"I never knew it otherwise, father," the woman laughed. "Ah, here is my Sam. Sam, here's father brought these two young gentlemen. They are the sons of Mr. Vickars, the parson at Hedingham. They are going to stop here to-night, and are going with him in the *Susan* to-morrow to London."

"Glad to see you, young masters," Sam said. "I have often heard Ann talk of your good father. I have just been on board the *Susan*, for I am sending up a couple of score sides of bacon in her, and have been giving Joe Chambers, her master, a list of things he is to get there and bring down for me. Now then, girl, bustle about and get dinner on as soon as you can. We are half an hour late. I am sure the young gentlemen here must be hungry. There's nothing like being on the water for getting an appetite."

A few minutes later a great dish of fish, a loaf of bread and some wooden platters, were placed on the table, and all set to at once. Forks had not yet come into use, and table-cloths were unknown, except among the upper classes. The boys found that in spite of their hearty breakfast their appetites were excellent. The fish were delicious, the bread was home-baked, and the beer from Colchester, which was already famous for its brewing. When they had finished, John Lirriper asked them if they would rather see what there was to be seen in the village, or go off to the ketch. They at once chose the latter alternative. On going down to the water's edge they found that the tide had risen sufficiently to enable Dick to bring the barge alongside the jetty. They were soon on board.

"Which is the *Susan*, Master Lirriper?"

"That's her lying out there with two others. She is the one lowest down the stream. We shall just fetch her comfortably."

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CHAPTER II.

A MEETING IN CHEPE.

ROW of ten minutes took the boat with Master Lirriper and the two boys alongside the ketch.

"How are you, Joe Chambers?" Master Lirriper hailed the skipper as he appeared on the deck of the *Susan*. "I have brought you two more passengers for London. They are going there under my charge."

"The more the merrier, Uncle John," the young skipper replied. "There are none others going this journey, so though our accommodation is not very extensive, we can put them up comfortably enough if they don't mind roughing it."

"Oh, we don't mind that," Geoffrey said, as they climbed on board; "besides, there seems lots of room."

"Not so much as you think," the skipper replied. "She is a roomy craft is the *Susan;* but she is pretty nigh all hold, and we are cramped a little in the fo'castle. Still we can sleep six, and that's just the number we shall have, for we carry a man and a boy besides myself. I think your flour will about fill her up, Master Lirriper. We have a pretty full cargo this time."

"Well, we shall soon see," John Lirriper said. "Are you ready to take the flour on board at once? Because, if so, we will begin to discharge."

"Yes, I am quite ready. You told me you were going to bring forty sacks, and I have left the middle part of the

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hold empty for them. Sam Hunter's bacon will stow in on the top of your sacks, and just fill her up to the beams there, as I reckon. I'll go below and stow them away as you hand them across."

In an hour the sacks of flour were transferred from the barge to the hold of the *Susan*, and the sides of bacon then placed upon them.

"It's a pity we haven't all the rest of the things on board," the skipper said, "and then we could have started by this evening's tide instead of waiting till the morning. The wind is fair, and I hate throwing away a fair wind. There is no saying where it may blow to-morrow, but I shouldn't be at all surprised if it isn't round to the south, and that will be foul for us till we get pretty nigh up into the mouth of the river. However, I gave them till to-night for getting all their things on board, and must therefore wait."

To the boys the *Susan* appeared quite a large craft, for there was not water up at Hedingham for vessels of her size; and though they had seen ships at Harwich, they had never before put foot on anything larger than Master Lirriper's barge. The *Susan* was about forty feet long by twelve feet beam, and drew, as her skipper informed them, near five feet of water. She was entirely decked. The cabin in the bows occupied some fourteen feet in length. The rest was devoted to cargo. They descended into the cabin, which seemed to them very dark, there being no light save what came down through the small hatchway. Still it looked snug and comfortable. There was a fireplace on one side of the ladder by which they had descended, and on this side there were two bunks, one above the other. On the other side there were lockers running along the entire length of the cabin. Two could sleep on these and two on the bunks above them.

"Now, young masters, you will take those two bunks on the

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top there. John Lirriper and I will sleep on the lockers underneath you. The man and the boy have the two on the other side. I put you on the top because there is a side board, and you can't fall out if she rolls, and besides the bunks are rather wider than the lockers below. If the wind is fair you won't have much of our company, because we shall hold on till we moor alongside the wharves of London; but if it's foul, or there is not enough of it to take us against tide, we have to anchor on the ebb, and then of course we turn in."

"How long do you take getting from here to London?"

"Ah, that I can tell you more about when I see what the weather is like in the morning. With a strong fair wind I have done it in twenty-four hours, and again with the wind foul it has taken me nigh a week. Taking one trip with another I should put it at three days."

"Well, now, we will be going ashore," John Lirriper said. "I will leave my barge alongside till tide turns, for I could not get her back again to the jetty so long as it is running in strong, so I will be off again in a couple of hours."

So saying he hauled up the dingy that was towing behind the barge, and he and Dick rowed the two boys ashore. Then he walked along with them to a spot where several craft were hauled up, pointing out to them the differences in their rig and build, and explained their purpose, and gave them the names of the principal ropes and stays.

"Now," he said, "it's getting on for supper-time, and it won't do to keep them waiting, for Ann is sure to have got some cakes made, and there's nothing puts a woman out more than people not being in to meals when they have got something special ready. After that I shall go out with Dick and bring the barge ashore. He will load her up to-morrow, and take her back single-handed; which can be done easy enough in such weather as this, but it is too much for one man if

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there is a strong wind blowing and driving her over to the one side or other of the river."

As John Lirriper had expected, his daughter had prepared a pile of hot cakes for supper, and her face brightened up when she saw the party return punctually. The boys had been up early, and had slept but little the night before, and were not sorry at eight o'clock to lie down on the bed of freshly-cut rushes covered with home-spun sheets, for regular beds of feathers were still but little used in England. At five o'clock they were astir again, and their hostess insisted on their eating a manchet of bread with some cheese, washed down by a stoup of ale before starting. Dick had the boat at the jetty ready to row them off, and as soon as they were on board the *Susan* preparations were made for a start.

The mainsail was first hoisted, its size greatly surprising the boys; then the foresail and jib were got up, and lastly the mizzen. Then the capstan was manned, and the anchor slowly brought on board, and the sails being sheeted home, the craft began to steal through the water. The tide was still draining up, and she had not as yet swung. The wind was light, and, as the skipper had predicted, was nearly due south. As the ketch made its way out from the mouth of the river, and the wide expanse of water opened before them, the boys were filled with delight. They had taken their seats, one on each side of the skipper, who was at the tiller.

"I suppose you steer by the compass, Master Chambers?" Geoffrey said. "Which is the compass? I have heard about it, always pointing to the north."

"It's down below, young sir; I will show it you presently. We steer by that at night, or when it's foggy; but on a fine day like this there is no need for it. There are marks put up on all the sands, and we steer by them. You see, the way the wind is now we can lay our course for the Whittaker. That's a

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cruel sand, that is, and stretches out a long way from a point lying away on the right there. Once past that we bear away to the south-west, for we are then, so to speak, fairly in the course of the river. There is many a ship has been cast away on the Whittaker. Not that it is worse than other sands. There are scores of them lying in the mouth of the river, and if it wasn't for the marks there would be no sailing in or out."

"Who put up the marks?" Lionel asked.

"They are put up by men who make a business of it. There is one boat of them sails backwards and forwards where the river begins to narrow above Sheerness, and every ship that goes up or down pays them something according to her size. Others cruise about with long poles, putting them in the sands wherever one gets washed away. They have got different marks on them. A single cross-piece, or two cross-pieces, or a circle, or a diamond; so that each sand has got its own particular mark. These are known to the masters of all ships that go up and down the river, and so they can tell exactly where they are, and what course to take. At night they anchor, for there would be no possibility of finding the way up or down in the dark. I have heard tell from mariners who have sailed abroad that there ain't a place anywhere with such dangerous sands as those we have got here at the mouth of the Thames."

In the first three or four hours' sail Geoffrey and Lionel acquired much nautical knowledge. They learned the difference between the mainmast and the mizzen, found that all the strong ropes that kept the masts erect and stiff were called stays, that the ropes that hoist sails are called halliards, and that sheets is the name given to the ropes that restrain the sails at the lower corner, and are used to haul them in more tightly when sailing close to the wind, or to ease them off when the wind is favourable. They also learned that the yards at the head of

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the main and mizzen sails are called gaffs, and those at the bottom, booms.

"I think that's about enough for you to remember in one day, young masters," John Lirriper said. "You bear all that in your mind, and remember that each halliard and sheet has the name of the sail to which it is attached, and you will have learnt enough to make yourself useful, and can lend a hand when the skipper calls out, 'Haul in the jib-sheet,' or 'Let go the fore-halliards.' Now sit yourselves down again and see what is doing. That beacon you can just see right ahead marks the end of the Whittaker Spit. When we get there we shall drop anchor till the tide turns. You see we are going across it now; but when we round that beacon we shall have it dead against us, and the wind would be too light to take us against it even if it were not from the quarter it is. You see there are two or three other craft brought up there."

"Where have they come from do you think, Master Lirriper?"

"Well, they may have come out from Burnham, or they may have come down from London and be going up to Burnham or to Bricklesey when the tide turns. There is a large ship anchored in the channel beyond the Whittaker. Of course she is going up when tide begins to flow. And there are the masts of two vessels right over there. They are in another channel. Between us and them there is a line of sands that you will see will show above the water when it gets a bit lower. That is the main channel, that is; and vessels coming from the south with a large draught of water generally use that, while this is the one that is handiest for ships from the north. Small vessels from the south come in by a channel a good bit beyond those ships. That is the narrowest of the three; and even light draught vessels don't use it much unless the wind is favourable, for there is not much room for them to beat up if the wind is against them."

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"What is to beat up, Master Lirriper?"

"Well, you will see about that presently. I don't think we shall be able to lay our course beyond the Whittaker. To lay our course means to steer the way we want to go; and if we can't do that we shall have to beat, and that is tedious work with a light wind like this."

They dropped anchor off the beacon, and the captain said that this was the time to take breakfast. The lads already smelt an agreeable odour arising from the cabin forward, where the boy had been for some time busily engaged, and soon the whole party were seated on the lockers in the cabin devouring fried fish.

"Master Chambers," Geoffrey said, "we have got two boiled pullets in our basket. Had we not better have them for dinner? They were cooked the evening before we came away, and I should think they had better be eaten now."

"You had better keep them for yourselves, Master Geoffrey," the skipper said. "We are accustomed to living on fish, but like enough you would get tired of it before we got to London."

But this the boys would not hear of, and it was accordingly arranged that the dinner should be furnished from the contents of the basket.

As soon as tide turned the anchor was hove up and the *Susan* got under way again. The boys soon learnt the meaning of the word beating, and found that it meant sailing backwards and forwards across the channel, with the wind sometimes on one side of the boat and sometimes on the other. Geoffrey wanted very much to learn why, when the wind was so nearly ahead, the boat advanced instead of drifting backwards or sideways. But this was altogether beyond the power of either Master Lirriper or Joe Chambers to explain. They said every one knew that when the sails were full a vessel went in the direction in which her head pointed. "It's just the same way with your-

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self, Master Geoffrey. You see, when you look one way that's the way you go. When you turn your head and point another way, of course you go off that way; and it's just the same thing with the ship."

"I don't think it's the same thing, Master Lirriper," Geoffrey said puzzled. "In one case the power that makes one go comes from the inside, and so one can go in any direction one likes; in the other it comes from outside, and you would think the ship would have to go any way the wind pushes her. If you stand up and I give you a push, I push you straight away from me. You don't go sideways or come forward in the direction of my shoulder, which is what the ship does."

John Lirriper took off his cap and scratched his head.

"I suppose it is as you say, Master Geoffrey, though I never thought of it before. There is some reason, no doubt, why the craft moves up against the wind so long as the sails are full, instead of drifting away to leeward; though I never heard tell of it, and never heard anyone ask before. I daresay a learned man could tell why it is; and if you ask your good father when you go back I would wager he can explain it. It always seems to me as if a boat have got some sort of sense, just like a human being or a horse, and when she knows which way you wants her to go she goes. That's how it seems to me—ain't it, Joe?"

"Something like that, uncle. Every one knows that a boat's got her humours, and sometimes she sails better than she does others; and each boat's got her own fancies. Some does their best when they are beating, and some are lively in a heavy sea, and seem as if they enjoy it; and others get sulky, and don't seem to take the trouble to lift their bows up when a wave meets them; and they groans and complains if the wind is too hard for them, just like a human being. When you goes to a new vessel you have got to learn her tricks and her ways and what she will do, and what she won't do, and just to humour

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her as you would a child. I don't say as I think she is actually alive; but every sailor will tell you that there is something about her that her builders never put there."

"That's so," John Lirriper agreed. "Look at a boat that is hove up when her work's done and going to be broken up. Why, anyone can tell her with half an eye. She looks that forlorn and melancholy that one's inclined to blubber at the sight of her. She don't look like that at any other time. When she is hove up she is going to die, and she knows it."

"But perhaps that's because the paint's off her sides and the ropes all worn and loose," Geoffrey suggested.

But Master Lirriper waved the suggestion aside as unworthy even of an answer, and repeated, "She knows it. Anyone can see that with half an eye."

Geoffrey and Lionel talked the matter over when they were sitting together on deck apart from the others. It was an age when there were still many superstitions current in the land. Even the upper classes believed in witches and warlocks, in charms and spells, in lucky and unlucky days, in the arts of magic, in the power of the evil eye; and although to the boys it seemed absurd that a vessel should have life, they were not prepared altogether to discredit an idea that was evidently thoroughly believed by those who had been on board ships all their lives. After talking it over for some time they determined to submit the question to their father on their return.

It took them two more tides before they were off Sheerness. The wind was now more favourable, and having increased somewhat in strength, the *Susan* made her way briskly along, heeling over till the water ran along her scuppers. There was plenty to see now, for there were many fishing-boats at work, some belonging, as Master Chambers told them, to the Medway, others to the little village of Leigh, whose church they saw at

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the top of the hill to their right. They met, too, several large craft coming down the river, and passed more than one, for the *Susan* was a fast boat.

"They would beat us," the skipper said when the boys expressed their surprise at their passing such large vessels, "if the wind were stronger or the water rough. We are doing our best, and if the wind rises I shall have to take in sail; while they could carry all theirs if it blew twice as hard. Then in a sea, weight and power tell; a wave that would knock the way almost out of us would hardly affect them at all."

So well did the *Susan* go along, that before the tide was much more than half done they passed the little village of Gravesend on their left, with the strong fort of Tilbury on the opposite shore, with its guns pointing on the river, and ready to give a good account of any Spaniard who should venture to sail up the Thames. Then at the end of the next reach the hamlet of Grays was passed on the right; a mile further Greenhithe on the left. Tide was getting slack now, but the *Susan* managed to get as far as Purfleet, and then dropped her anchor.

"This is our last stopping-place," Joe Chambers said. "The morning tide will carry us up to London Bridge."

"Then you will not go on with to-night's tide?" Geoffrey asked.

"No; the river gets narrower every mile, and I do not care to take the risk of navigating it after dark, especially as there is always a great deal of shipping moored above Greenwich. Tide will begin to run up at about five o'clock, and by ten we ought to be safely moored alongside near London Bridge. So we should not gain a great deal by going on this evening instead of to-morrow morning, and I don't suppose you are in a particular hurry."

"Oh, no," Lionel said. "We would much rather go on in the morning, otherwise we should miss everything by the way;

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and there is the Queen's Palace at Greenwich that I want to see above all things."

Within a few minutes of the hour the skipper had named for their arrival, the *Susan* was moored alongside some vessels lying off one of the wharves above the Tower. The boys' astonishment had risen with every mile of their approach to the city, and they were perfectly astounded at the amount of shipping that they now beheld. The great proportion were of course coasters, like themselves, but there were many large vessels among them, and of these fully half were flying foreign colours. Here were traders from the Netherlands, with the flag that the Spaniards had in vain endeavoured to lower, flying at their mast-heads. Here were caravels from Venice and Genoa, laden with goods from the East. Among the rest Master Chambers pointed out to the lads the ship in which Sir Francis Drake had circumnavigated the world, and that in which Captain Stevens had sailed to India, round the Cape of Good Hope. There were many French vessels also in the Pool, and indeed almost every flag save that of Spain was represented. Innumerable wherries darted about among the shipping, and heavier cargo boats dropped along in more leisurely fashion. Across the river, a quarter of a mile above the point at which they were lying, stretched London Bridge, with its narrow arches and the houses projecting beyond it on their supports of stout timbers. Beyond, on the right, rising high above the crowded roofs, was the lofty spire of St. Paul's. The boys were almost awed by this vast assemblage of buildings. That London was a great city they had known, but they were not prepared for so immense a difference between it and the place where they had lived all their lives. Only with the Tower were they somewhat disappointed. It was very grand and very extensive, but not so much grander than the stately abode of the Veres as they had looked for.

"I wouldn't change, if I were the earl, with the queen's

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majesty," Geoffrey said. "Of course it is larger than Hedingham, but not so beautiful, and it is crowded in by the houses, and has not like our castle a fair look-out on all sides. Why, there can be no hunting or hawking near here, and I can't think what the nobles can find to do all day."

"Now, young sirs," Master Lirriper said, "if you will get your wallets we will go ashore at once."

The boys were quite bewildered as they stepped ashore by the bustle and confusion. Brawny porters carrying heavy packages on their backs pushed along unceremoniously, saying from time to time in a mechanical sort of way, "By your leave, sir!" but pushing on and shouldering passers-by into the gutter without the smallest compunction. The narrowness and dinginess of the streets greatly surprised and disappointed the boys, who found that in these respects even Harwich compared favourably with the region they were traversing. Presently, however, after passing through several lanes and alleys, they emerged into a much broader street, alive with shops. The people who were walking here were for the most part well dressed and of quiet demeanour, and there was none of the rough bustle that had prevailed in the river-side lanes.

"This is Eastchepe," their conductor said; "we have not far to go now. The street in which my friend dwells lies to the right, between this and Tower Street. I could have taken you a shorter way there, but I thought that your impressions of London would not be favourable did I take you all the way through those ill-smelling lanes."

In a quarter of an hour they arrived at their destination, and entered the shop, which smelt strongly of tar; coils of rope of all sizes were piled up one upon another by the walls, while on shelves above them were blocks, lanterns, compasses, and a great variety of gear of whose use the boys were ignorant. The chandler was standing at his door.

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"I am right glad to see you, Master Lirriper," he said, "and have been expecting you for the last two or three days. My wife would have it that some evil must have befallen you; but you know what women are. They make little allowance for time or tide or distance, but expect that every one can so arrange his journeys as to arrive at the very moment when they begin to expect him. But who have you here with you?"

"These are the sons of the worshipful Mr. Vickars, the rector of our parish, and tutor to the Earl of Oxford and several of the young Veres, his cousins—a wise gentleman and a kind one, and much loved among us. He has entrusted his two sons to me that I might show them somewhat of this city of yours. I said that I was right sure that you and your good dame would let them occupy the chamber you intended for me, while I can make good shift on board the *Susan*."

"Nay, nay, Master Lirriper; our house is big enough to take in you and these two young masters, and Dorothy would deem it a slight indeed upon her hospitality were you not to take up your abode here too. You will be heartily welcome, young sirs, and though such accommodation as we can give you will not be equal to that which you are accustomed to, I warrant me that you will find it a pleasant change after that poky little cabin on board the *Susan*. I know it well, for I supply her with stores, and have often wondered how men could accustom themselves to pass their lives in places where there is scarce room to turn, to say nothing of the smell of fish that always hangs about it. But if you will follow me I will take you up to my good dame, to whose care I must commit you for the present, as my foreman, John Watkins, is down by the river-side seeing to the proper delivery of divers stores on board a ship which sails with the next tide for Holland. My apprentices, too, are both out, as I must own is their wont. They always make excuses to slip down to the river-side when there

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is aught doing, and I am far too easy with the varlets. So at present, you see, I cannot long leave my shop."

So saying the chandler preceded them up a wide staircase that led from a passage behind the shop, and the boys perceived that the house was far more roomy and comfortable than they had judged from its outward appearance. Turning to the left when he reached the top of the stairs the chandler opened a door.

"Dorothy," he said, "here is your kinsman, Master Lirriper, who has suffered none of the misadventures you have been picturing to yourself for the last two days, and he has brought with him these young gentlemen, sons of the rector of Hedingham, to show them something of London."

"You are welcome, young gentlemen," Dame Dorothy said, "though why anyone should come to London when he can stay away from it I know not."

"Why, Dorothy, you are always running down our city, though I know right well that were I to move down with you to your native Essex again you would very soon cry out for the pleasures of the town."

"That would I not," she said. "I would be well contented to live in fresh country air all the rest of my life, though I do not say that London has not its share of pleasures also, though I care but little for them."

"Ah, Master Lirriper," her husband said laughing, "you would not think, to hear her talk, that there is not a feast or a show that Dorothy would stay away from. She never misses an opportunity, I warrant you, of showing herself off in her last new kirtle and gown. But I must be going down; there is no one below, and if a customer comes and finds the shop empty he will have but a poor idea of me, and will think that I am away gossiping instead of attending to my business."

"Are you hungry, young sirs?" the dame asked. "Because

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if so the maid shall bring up a manchet of bread and a cup of sack; if not, our evening meal will be served in the course of an hour."

The boys both said that they were perfectly able to wait until the meal came; and Geoffrey added, "If you will allow us, mistress, as doubtless you have private matters to talk of with Master Lirriper, my brother and I will walk out for an hour to see something of the town."

"Mind that you lose not your way," Master Lirriper said. "Do not go beyond Eastchepe, I beg you. There are the shops to look at there, and the fashions of dress and other matters that will occupy your attention well enough for that short time. To-morrow morning I will myself go with you, and we can then wander further abroad. I have promised your good father to look after you, you know; and it will be but a bad beginning if you meet with any untoward adventure upon this the first day of your arrival here."

"We will not go beyond the limits of Eastchepe; and as to adventures, I can't see very well how any can befall us."

"Oh, there are plenty of adventures to be met with in London, young sir; and I shall be well content if on the day when we again embark on board the *Susan* none of them have fallen to your share."

The two lads accordingly sallied out and amused themselves greatly by staring at the goods exhibited in the open shops. They were less surprised at the richness and variety of the silver work, at the silks from the East, the costly satins, and other stuffs, than most boys from the country would have been, for they were accustomed to the splendour and magnificence displayed by the various noble guests at the castle, and saw nothing here that surpassed the brilliant shows made at the jousting and entertainments at Hedingham.

It was the scene that was novel to them: the shouts of the

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THE LONDON APPRENTICES MAKE FUN OF LIONEL AND GEOFFREY.

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apprentices inviting attention to their employers' wares, the crowd that filled the street, consisting for the most part of the citizens themselves, but varied by nobles and knights of the court, by foreigners from many lands, by soldiers and men-at-arms from the Tower, by countrymen and sailors. Their amusement was sometimes turned into anger by the flippant remarks of the apprentices; these varlets, perceiving easily enough by the manner of their attire that they were from the country, were not slow, if their master happened for the moment to be absent, in indulging in remarks that set Geoffrey and Lionel into a fever to commit a breach of the peace. The "What do you lack, masters?" with which they generally addressed passers-by would be exchanged for remarks such as, "Do not trouble the young gentlemen, Nat. Do you not see they are up in the town looking for some of their master's calves?" or, "Look you, Philip, here are two rustics who have come up to town to learn manners."

"I quite see, Geoffrey," Lionel said, taking his brother by the arm and half dragging him away as he saw that he was clenching his fist and preparing to avenge summarily one of these insults even more pointed than usual, "that Master Lirriper was not very far out, and there is no difficulty in meeting with adventures in the streets of London. However, we must not give him occasion on this our first stroll in the streets to say that we cannot be trusted out of his sight. If we were to try to punish these insolent varlets we should have them upon us like a swarm of bees, and should doubtless get worsted in the encounter, and might even find ourselves hauled off to the lock-up, and that would be a nice tale for Master Lirriper to carry back to Hedingham."

"That is true enough, Lionel; but it is not easy to keep one's temper when one is thus tried. I know not how it is they see so readily that we are strangers, for surely we have mixed

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enough with the earl's family and friends to have rubbed off the awkwardness that they say is common to country folk; and as to our dress, I do not see much difference between its fashion and that of other people. I suppose it is because we look interested in what is going on, instead of strolling along like those two youths opposite with our noses in the air, as if we regarded the city and its belongings as infinitely below our regard. Well, I think we had best be turning back to Master Swindon's; it will not do to be late for our meal."

"Well, young sirs, what do you think of our shops?" Dame Swindon asked as they entered.

"The shops are well enough," Geoffrey replied; "but your apprentices seem to me to be an insolent set of jackanapes, who take strange liberties with passers-by, and who would be all the better for chastisement. If it hadn't been that Lionel and I did not wish to become engaged in a brawl, we should have given some of them lessons in manners."

"They are free in speech," Dame Swindon said, "and are an impudent set of varlets. They have quick eyes and ready tongues, and are no respecters of persons save of their masters and of citizens in a position to lay complaints against them and to secure them punishment. They hold together greatly, and it is as well that you should not become engaged in a quarrel with them. At times they have raised serious tumults, and have even set not only the watch but the citizens at large at defiance. Strong measures have been several times taken against them; but they are a powerful body, seeing that in every shop there are one or more of them, and they can turn out with their clubs many thousand strong. They have what they call their privileges, and are as ready to defend them as are the citizens of London to uphold their liberties. Ordinances have been passed many times by the fathers of the city, regulating their conduct and the hours at which they may be

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abroad and the carrying of clubs and matters of this kind, but the apprentices seldom regard them, and if the watch arrest one for a breach of regulations, he raises a cry, and in two or three minutes a swarm of them collect and rescue the offender from his hands. Therefore it is seldom that the watch interferes with them."

"It would almost seem then that the apprentices are in fact the masters," Geoffrey said.

"Not quite as bad as that," Master Swindon replied. "There are the rules which they have to obey when at home, and if not they get a whipping; but it is difficult to keep a hand over them when they are abroad. After the shops are closed and the supper over they have from time immemorial the right to go out for two hours' exercise. They are supposed to go and shoot at the butts; but archery, I grieve to say, is falling into disrepute, and although many still go to the butts the practice is no longer universal. But here is supper."

Few words were spoken during the meal. The foreman and the two apprentices came up and sat down with the family, and it was not until these had retired that the conversation was again resumed.

"Where are you going to take them to-morrow, Master Lirriper?"

"To-morrow we will see the city, the shops in Chepe, the Guildhall, and St. Paul's, then we shall issue out from Temple Bar and walk along the Strand through the country to Westminster and see the great abbey, then perhaps take a boat back. The next day, if the weather be fine, we will row up to Richmond and see the palace there, and I hope you will go with us, Mistress Dorothy; it is a pleasant promenade and a fashionable, and methinks the river with its boats is after all the prettiest sight in London."

"Ah, you think there can be nothing pretty without water.

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That is all very well for one who is ever afloat, Master Lirriper; but give me Chepe at high noon with all its bravery of dress, and the bright shops, and the gallants of the court, and our own citizens too, who if not quite so gay in colour are proper men, better looking to my mind than some of the fops with their silver and satins."

"That's right, Dorothy," her husband said; "spoken like the wife of a citizen."

All these plans were destined to be frustrated. As soon as breakfast was over the next morning Master Lirriper started with the two boys, and they had but just entered Chepeside when they saw two young men approaching.

"Why, Lionel, here is Francis Vere!" Geoffrey exclaimed. "I thought he was across in Holland with the Earl of Leicester." They doffed their caps. Captain Vere, for such was now his rank, looked at them in surprise.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "here are Mr. Vickars' two sons. How came you here, lads? Have you run away from home to see the wonders of London, or to list as volunteers for the campaigns against the Dons?"

"I wish we were, Mr. Francis," Geoffrey said. "You promised when you were at Hedingham a year and a half since that you would some day take us to the wars with you, and our father, seeing that neither of us have a mind to enter the church, has quite consented that we shall become soldiers, the more so as there is a prospect of fighting for the persecuted Protestants of Holland. And oh, Mr. Francis, could it be now? You know we daily exercise with arms at the castle, and we are both strong and sturdy for our age, and believe me you should not see us flinch before the Spaniards however many of them there were."

"Tut, tut!" Captain Vere laughed. "Here are young cockerels, Allen; what think you of these for soldiers to stand against the Spanish pikemen?"

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"There are many of the volunteers who are not very much older than they are," Captain Allen replied. "There are two in my company who must be between seventeen and eighteen."

"Ah! but these boys are three years younger than that."

"Would you not take us as your pages, Mr. Francis?" Lionel urged. "We would do faithful service, and then when we come to the age that you could enter us as volunteers we should already have learnt a little of war."

"Well, well, I cannot stop to talk to you now, for I am on my way to the Tower on business. I am only over from Holland for a day or two with despatches from the Earl to Her Majesty's Council, and am lodging at Westminster in a house that faces the abbey. It is one of my cousin Edward's houses, and you will see the Vere cognizance over the door. Call there at one hour after noon, and I will have a talk with you; but do not buoy yourselves up with hopes as to your going with me." So saying, with a friendly nod of his head Francis Vere continued his way eastward.

"What think you, Allen?" he asked his comrade as they went along. "I should like to take the lads with me if I could. Their father, who is the rector of Hedingham, taught my cousin Edward as well as my brothers and myself. I saw a good deal of the boys when I was at home. They are sturdy young fellows, and used to practise daily, as we did at their age, with the men-at-arms at the castle, and can use their weapons. A couple of years of apprenticeship would be good schooling for them. One cannot begin to learn the art of war too young, and it is because we have all been so ignorant of it that our volunteers in Holland have not done better."

"I think, Vere, that they are too young yet to be enlisted as volunteers, although in another two years, perhaps, you might admit the elder of the two. But I see no reason why, if you are so inclined, you should not take them with you as pages.

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Each company has its pages and boys, and you might take these two for the special service of yourself and your officers. They would then be on pretty well the same footing as the five gentlemen volunteers you have already with you, and would be distinct from the lads who have entered as pages to the company. I suppose that you have not yet your full number of boys?"

"No; there are fifteen boys allowed, one to each ten men, and I am several short of this number, and have already written my brother John to get six sturdy lads from among our own tenantry and to send them over in the first ship from Harwich. Yes, I will take these lads with me. I like their spirit, and we are all fond of their father, who is a very kindly as well as learned man."

"I don't suppose he will thank you greatly, Francis," Captain Allen laughed.

"His goodwife is more likely to be vexed than he is," Captain Vere said, "for it will give him all the more time for the studies in which he is wrapped up. Besides, it will be a real service to the boys. It will shorten their probation as volunteers, and they may get commissions much earlier than they otherwise would do. We are all mere children in the art of war; for truly before Roger Morgan first took out his volunteers to fight for the Dutch there was scarce a man in England who knew how to range a company in order. You and I learned somewhat of our business in Poland, and some of our leaders have also had a few lessons in the art of war in foreign countries, but most of our officers are altogether new to the work. However, we have good masters, and I trust these Spaniards may teach us how to beat them in time; but at present, as I said, we are all going to school, and the earlier one begins at school the sooner one learns its lessons. Besides, we must have pages, and it will be more pleasant for me having lads who belong in a sort of

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way to our family, and to whom, if I am disposed, I can talk of people at home. They are high-spirited and full of fun, and I should like to have them about me. But here we are at the Tower. We shall not be long, I hope, over the list of arms and munitions that the earl has sent for. When we have done we will take boat back to Westminster. Half an hour will take us there, as the tide will be with us."

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CHAPTER III.

IN THE LOW COUNTRY.

MASTER LIRRIPER had stood apart while the boys were conversing with Francis Vere.

"What do you think, Master Lirriper?" Geoffrey exclaimed as they joined him. "We have asked Mr. Vere to take us with him as pages to the war in the Low Country, and though he said we were not to be hopeful about his reply, I do think he will take us. We are to go round to Westminster at one o'clock to see him again. What do you think of that?"

"I don't know what to think, Master Geoffrey. It takes me all by surprise, and I don't know how I stand in the matter. You see, your father gave you into my charge, and what could I say to him if I went back empty-handed?"

"But, you see, it is with Francis Vere," Geoffrey said. "If it had been with anyone else it would be different. But the Veres are his patrons, and he looks upon the earl, and Mr. Francis and his brothers, almost as he does on us; and, you know, he has already consented to our entering the army some day. Besides, he can't blame you; because, of course, Mr. Vere will write to him himself and say that he has taken us, and so you can't be blamed in the matter. My father would know well enough that you could not withstand the wishes of one of the Veres, who are lords of Hedingham and all the country round."

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"I should withstand them if I thought they were wrong," the boatman said sturdily, "and if I were sure that your father would object to your going; but that is what I am not sure. He may think it the best thing for you to begin early under the protection of Master Francis, and again he may think you a great deal too young for such wild work. He has certainly always let you have pretty much your own way, and has allowed you to come and go as you like, but this is a different business altogether. I am sorely bested as to what I ought to do."

"Well, nothing is settled yet, Master Lirriper; and, besides, I don't see that you can help yourself in the matter, and if Mr. Vere says he will take us I suppose you can't carry us off by force."

"It is Mistress Vickars that I am thinking of more than your father. The vicar is an easy-going gentleman, but Mistress Vickars speaks her mind, and I expect she will be in a terrible taking over it, and will rate me soundly; though, as you say, I do not see how I can help myself in the matter. Well now, let us look at the shops and at the Guildhall, and then we will make our way down to Westminster as we had proposed to do and see the abbey; by that time it will be near the hour at which you are to call upon Mr. Vere."

But the sights that the boys had been so longing to see had for the time lost their interest in their eyes. The idea that it was possible that Mr. Vere would take them with him to fight against the cruel oppressors of the Low Country was so absorbing that they could think of nothing else. Even the wonders of the Guildhall and St. Paul's received but scant attention, and the armourers' shops, in which they had a new and lively interest, alone sufficed to detain them. Even the gibes of the apprentices fell dead upon their ears. These varlets might laugh, but what would they say if they knew that they

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were going to fight the Spaniards. The thought so altered them that they felt almost a feeling of pity for these lads, condemned to stay at home and mind their masters' shops.

As to John Lirriper, he was sorely troubled in his mind, and divided between what he considered his duty to the vicar and his life-long respect and reverence towards the lords of Hedingham. The feudal system was extinct, but feudal ideas still lingered among the people. Their lords could no longer summon them to take the field, had no longer power almost of life and death over them, but they were still their lords, and regarded with the highest respect and reverence. The earls of Oxford were, in the eyes of the people of those parts of Essex where their estates lay, personages of greater importance than the queen herself, of whose power and attributes they had but a very dim notion. It was not so very long since people had risen in rebellion against the queen, but such an idea as that of rising against their lords had never entered the mind of a single inhabitant of Hedingham.

However, Master Lirriper came to the conclusion that he was, as Geoffrey had said, powerless to interfere. If Mr. Francis Vere decided to take the boys with him, what could he do to prevent it? He could hardly take them forcibly down to the boat against their will, and even could he do so their father might not approve, and doubtless the earl, when he came to hear of it, would be seriously angry at this act of defiance of his kinsman. Still, he was sure that he should have a very unpleasant time with Mistress Vickars. But, as he reassured himself, it was, after all, better to put up with a woman's scolding than to bear the displeasure of the Earl of Oxford, who could turn him out of his house, ruin his business, and drive him from Hedingham. After all, it was natural that these lads should like to embark on this adventure with Mr. Francis Vere, and it would doubtless be to their interest to be thus closely connected with him.

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At any rate, if it was to be it was, and he, John Lirriper, could do nothing to prevent it. Having arrived at this conclusion he decided to make the best of it, and began to chat cheerfully with the boys.

Precisely at the appointed hour John Lirriper arrived with the two lads at the entrance to the house facing the abbey. Two or three servitors, whose doublets were embroidered with the cognizance of the Veres, were standing in front of the door.

"Why, it is Master Lirriper!" one of them said. "Why, what has brought you here? I did not know that your trips often extended to London."

"Nor do they," John Lirriper said. "It was the wind and my nephew's craft the *Susan* that brought me to London, and it is the will of Mr. Francis that these two young gentlemen should meet him here at one o'clock that has brought me to this door."

"Captain Francis is in; for, you know, he is a captain now, having been lately appointed to a company in the Earl of Leicester's army. He returned an hour since, and has but now finished his meal. Do you wish to go up with these young masters, or shall I conduct them to him?"

"You had best do that," John Lirriper answered. "I will remain here below if Captain Francis desires to see me or has any missive to intrust to me."

The boys followed the servant upstairs, and were shown into a room where Francis Vere, his cousin the Earl of Oxford, and Captain Allen were seated at table.

"Well, lads," the earl said, "so you want to follow my cousin Francis to the wars?"

"That is our wish, my lord, if Captain Francis will be so good as to take us with him."

"And what will my good tutor your father say to it?" the earl asked smiling.

"I think, my lord," Geoffrey said boldly, "that if you your-

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self will tell my father you think it is for our good, he will say naught against it."

"Oh, you want to throw the responsibility upon me, and to embroil me with your father and Mistress Vickars as an abettor of my cousin Francis in the kidnapping of children? Well, Francis, you had better explain to them what their duties will be if they go with you."

"You will be my pages," Francis Vere said, "and will perform the usual duties of pages in good families when in the field. It is the duty of pages to aid in collecting firewood and forage, and in all other ways to make themselves useful. You will bear the same sort of relation to the gentlemen volunteers as they do towards the officers. They are aspirants for commissions as officers as you will be to become gentlemen volunteers. You must not think that your duties will be light, for they will not, and you will have to bear many discomforts and hardships. But you will be in an altogether different position from that of the boys who are the pages of the company. You will, apart from your duties, and bearing in mind the difference of your age, associate with the officers and the gentlemen volunteers on terms of equality when not engaged upon duty. On duty you will have to render the same strict and unquestionable obedience that all soldiers pay to those of superior rank. What say you? Are you still anxious to go? Because, if so, I have decided to take you."

Geoffrey and Lionel both expressed their thanks in proper terms, and their earnest desire to accompany Captain Vere, and to behave in all ways conformably to his orders and instructions.

"Very well, that is settled," Francis Vere said. "The earl is journeying down to Hedingham to-morrow, and has kindly promised to take charge of a letter from me to your father, and personally to assure him that this early embarkation upon military life would prove greatly to your advantage."

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"Supposing that you are not killed by the Spaniards or carried off by fever," the earl put in; "for although possibly that might be an advantage to humanity in general, it could scarcely be considered one to you personally."

"We are ready to take our risk of that, my lord," Geoffrey said; "and are indeed greatly beholden both to Captain Francis for his goodness in taking us with him, and to yourself in kindly undertaking the mission of reconciling our father to our departure."

"You have not told me yet how it is that I find you in London?" Francis Vere said.

"We only came up for a week, sir, to see the town. We are in charge of Master Lirriper, who owns a barge on the river, and plies between Hedingham and Bricklesey, but who was coming up to London in a craft belonging to his nephew, and who took charge of us. We are staying at the house of Master Swindon, a citizen and ship-chandler."

"Is Master Lirriper below?"

"He is, sir."

"Then in that case he had better go back to the house and bring your mails here. I shall sail from Deptford the day after to-morrow with the turn of tide. You had best remain here now. There will be many things necessary for you to get before you start. I will give instructions to one of my men-at-arms to go with you to purchase them."

"I will take their outfit upon myself, Francis," the earl said. "My steward shall go out with them and see to it. It is the least I can do when I am abetting you in depriving my old tutor of his sons." He touched a bell and a servitor entered. "See that these young gentlemen are fed and attended to. They will remain here for the night. Tell Master Dotterell to come hither to me."

The boys bowed deeply and retired.

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"It is all settled, Master Lirriper," they said when they reached the hall below. "We are to sail with Captain Francis the day after to-morrow, and you will be pleased to hear that the earl himself has taken charge of the matter, and will see our father and communicate the news to him."

"That is a comfort indeed," John Lirriper said fervently; "for I would most as soon have had to tell him that the *Susan* had gone down and that you were both drowned, as that I had let you both slip away to the wars when he had given you into my charge. But if the earl takes the matter in hand I do not think that even your lady mother can bear very heavily on me. And now, what is going to be done?"

"We are to remain here in order that suitable clothes may be obtained for us by the time we sail. Will you bring down to-morrow morning our wallets from Master Swindon's, and thank him and his good dame for their hospitality, and say that we are sorry to leave them thus suddenly without having an opportunity of thanking them ourselves? We will write letters to-night to our father and mother, and give them to you to take with you when you return."

John Lirriper at once took his departure, greatly relieved in mind to find that the earl himself had taken the responsibility upon his shoulders, and would break the news long before he himself reached Hedingham. A few minutes later a servitor conducted the boys to an apartment where a meal was laid for them; and as soon as this was over they were joined by the steward, who requested them to set out with him at once, as there were many things to be done and but short time for doing them. No difficulty in the way of time was, however, thrown in the way by the various tradesmen they visited, these being all perfectly ready to put themselves to inconvenience to do pleasure to so valuable a patron as the powerful Earl of Oxford.

Three suits of clothes were ordered for each of them: the one

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such as that worn by pages in noble families upon ordinary occasions, another of a much richer kind for special ceremonies and gaieties, the third a strong, serviceable suit for use when actually in the field. Then they were taken to an armourer's where each was provided with a light morion or headpiece, breast-plate and backpiece, sword and dagger. A sufficient supply of under garments, boots, and other necessaries were also purchased; and when all was complete they returned highly delighted to the house. It was still scarce five o'clock, and they went across to the abbey and wandered for some time through its aisles, greatly impressed with its dignity and beauty now that their own affairs were off their mind.

They returned to the house again, and after supper wrote their letters to their father and mother, saying that they hoped they would not be displeased at the step they had taken, and which they would not have ventured upon had they not already obtained their father's consent to their entering the army. They knew, of course, that he had not contemplated their doing so for some little time; but as so excellent an opportunity had offered, and above all, as they were going out to fight against the Spaniards for the oppressed people of the Low Countries, they hoped their parents would approve of the steps they had taken, not having had time or opportunity to consult them.

At noon two days later Francis Vere with Captain Allen and the two boys took their seats in the stern of a skiff manned by six rowers. In the bow were the servitors of the two officers, and the luggage was stowed in the extreme stern.

"The tide is getting slack, is it not?" Captain Vere asked the boatmen.

"Yes, sir; it will not run up much longer. It will be pretty well slack-water by the time we get to the bridge."

Keeping close to the bank the boat proceeded at a rapid pace.

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Several times the two young officers stood up and exchanged salutations with ladies or gentlemen of their acquaintance. As the boatman had anticipated, tide was slack by the time they arrived at London Bridge, and they now steered out into the middle of the river.

"Give way, lads," Captain Allen said. "We told the captain we would not keep him waiting long after high-water, and he will be getting impatient if he does not see us before long."

As they shot past the *Susan* the boys waved their hands to Master Lirriper, who, after coming down in the morning and receiving their letters for their parents, had returned at once to the city and had taken his place on board the *Susan*, so as to be able to tell their father that he had seen the last of them. The distance between London Bridge and Deptford was traversed in a very short time. A vessel with her flags flying and her canvas already loosened was hanging to a buoy some distance out in the stream, and as the boat came near enough for the captain to distinguish those on board, the mooring-rope was slipped, the head sails flattened in, and the vessel began to swing round. Before her head was down stream the boat was alongside. The two officers followed by the boys ascended the ladder by the side. The luggage was quickly handed up, and the servitors followed. The sails were sheeted home, and the vessel began to move rapidly through the water.

The boys had thought the *Susan* an imposing craft, but they were surprised, indeed, at the space on board the *Dover Castle*. In the stern there was a lofty poop with spacious cabins. Six guns were ranged along on each side of the deck, and when the sails were got up they seemed so vast to the boys that they felt a sense of littleness on board the great craft. They had been relieved to find that Captain Vere had his own servitor with him; for in talking it over they had mutually expressed their

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doubt as to their ability to render such service as Captain Vere would be accustomed to.

The wind was from the south-west, and the vessel was off Sheerness before the tide turned. There was, however, no occasion to anchor, for the wind was strong enough to take them against the flood.

During the voyage they had no duties to perform. The ship's cook prepared the meals, and the officers' servants waited on them, the lads taking their meals with the two officers. Their destination was Bergen-op-Zoom, a town at the mouth of the Scheldt, of the garrison of which the companies of both Francis Vere and Captain Allen formed part.

As soon as the low coasts of Holland came in sight the boys watched them with the most lively interest.

"We are passing Sluys now," Captain Vere said. "The land almost ahead of us is Walcheren; and that spire belongs to Flushing. We could go outside and up the channel between the island and Beveland, and then up the Eastern Scheldt to Bergen-op-Zoom; but instead of that we shall follow the western channel, which is more direct."

"It is as flat as our Essex coast," Geoffrey remarked.

"Aye, and flatter; for the greater part of the land lies below the level of the sea, which is only kept out by great dams and dykes. At times when the rivers are high and the wind keeps back their waters they burst the dams and spread over a vast extent of country. The Zuider-Zee was so formed in 1170 and 1395, and covers a tract as large as the whole county of Essex. Twenty-six years later the river Maas broke its banks and flooded a wide district. Seventy-two villages were destroyed and 100,000 people lost their life. The lands have never been recovered; and where a fertile country once stood is now a mere swamp."

"I shouldn't like living there," Lionel said. "It would be

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terrible, every time the rivers are full and the wind blows, to think that at any moment the banks may burst and the flood come rushing over you."

"It is all habit," Captain Vere replied; "I don't suppose they trouble themselves about it. But they are very particular in keeping their dykes in good repair. The water is one of the great defences of their country. In the first place there are innumerable streams to be crossed by an invader, and in the second, they can as a last resource cut the dykes and flood the country. These Dutchmen, as far as I have seen of them, are hard-working and industrious people, steady and patient, and resolved to defend their independence to the last. This they have indeed proved by the wonderful resistance they have made against the power of Spain. There, you see the ship's head has been turned and we shall before long be in the channel. Sluys lies up that channel on the right. It is an important place. Large vessels can go no further, but are unloaded there and the cargoes taken to Bruges and thence distributed to many other towns. They say that in 1468 as many as a hundred and fifty ships a day arrived at Sluys. That gives you an idea of the trade that the Netherlands carry on. The commerce of this one town was as great as is that of London at the present time. But since the troubles the trade of Sluys has fallen off a good deal."

The ship had to anchor here for two or three hours until the tide turned, for the wind had fallen very light and they could not make head against the ebb. As soon as it turned they again proceeded on their way, dropping quietly up with the tide. The boys climbed up into the tops, and thence could see a wide extent of country dotted with villages stretching beyond the banks, which restricted their view from the decks. In five hours Bergen-op-Zoom came in sight, and they presently dropped anchor opposite the town. The boat was lowered, and the two

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officers with the lads were rowed ashore. They were met as they landed by several young officers.

"Welcome back, Vere; welcome, Allen. You have been lucky indeed in having a few days in England, and getting a view of something besides this dreary flat country and its sluggish rivers. What is the last news from London?"

"There is little news enough," Vere replied. "We were only four days in London, and were busy all the time. And how are things here? Now that summer is at hand and the country drying the Dons ought to be bestirring themselves."

"They say that they are doing so," the officer replied. "We have news that the Duke of Parma is assembling his army at Bruges, where he is collecting the pick of the Spanish infantry with a number of Italian regiments which have joined him. He sent off the Marquess Del Vasto with the Sieur De Hautepenne towards Bois-le-Duc. General Count Hohenlohe, who, as you know, we English always call Count Holland, went off with a large force to meet him, and we heard only this morning that a battle has been fought, Hautepenne killed, and the fort of Crevecœur on the Maas captured. From what I hear, some of our leaders think that it was a mistake so to scatter our forces, and if Parma moves forward from Bruges against Sluys, which is likely enough, we shall be sorely put to it to save the place."

As they were talking they proceeded into the town, and presently reached the house where Francis Vere had his quarters. The officers and gentlemen volunteers of his company soon assembled, and Captain Vere introduced the two boys to them.

"They are young gentlemen of good family," he said, "who will act as my pages until they are old enough to be enrolled as gentlemen volunteers. I commend them to your good offices. Their father is a learned and reverend gentleman who was my

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tutor, and also tutor to my cousin, the Earl of Oxford, by whom he is greatly valued. They are lads of spirit, and have been instructed in the use of arms at Hedingham as if they had been members of our family. I am sure, gentlemen volunteers, that you will receive them as friends. I propose that they shall take their meals with you, but of course they will lodge here with me and my officers; but as you are in the next house this will cause no inconvenience. I trust that we shall not remain here long, but shall soon be on the move. We have now been here seven months, and it is high time we were doing something. We didn't bargain to come over here and settle down for life in a dull Dutch town."

In a few hours the boys found themselves quite at home in their new quarters. The gentlemen volunteers received them cordially, and they found that for the present their duties would be extremely light, consisting chiefly in carrying messages and orders; for as the officers had all servants of their own, Captain Vere dispensed with their attendance at meals. There was much to amuse and interest them in Bergen-op-Zoom. It reminded them to some extent of Harwich, with its narrow streets and quaint houses; but the fortifications were far stronger, and the number of churches struck them as prodigious. The population differed in no very large degree in dress from that of England, but the people struck them as being slower and more deliberate in their motions. The women's costumes differed much more widely from those to which they were accustomed, and their strange and varied head-dresses, their bright-coloured handkerchiefs, and the amount of gold necklaces and bracelets that they wore, struck them with surprise.

Their stay in Bergen-op-Zoom was even shorter than they had anticipated, for three days after their arrival a boat came with a letter from Sir William Russell, the governor at Flushing. He said that he had just received an urgent letter from

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the Dutch governor of Sluys, saying that Parma's army was advancing from Bruges towards the city, and had seized and garrisoned the fort of Blankenburg on the sea-coast to prevent reinforcements arriving from Ostend; he therefore prayed the governor of Flushing to send off troops and provisions with all haste to enable him to resist the attack. Sir William requested that the governor of Bergen-op-Zoom would at once embark the greater portion of his force on board ship and send them to Sluys. He himself was having a vessel filled with grain for the use of the inhabitants, and was also sending every man he could spare from Flushing.

In a few minutes all was bustle in the town. The trumpets of the various companies called the soldiers to arms, and in a very short time the troops were on their way towards the river. Here several ships had been requisitioned for the service; and as the companies marched down they were conducted to the ships to which they were allotted by the quarter-masters. Geoffrey and Lionel felt no small pride as they marched down with their troop. They had for the first time donned their steel-caps, breast and back pieces; but this was rather for convenience of carriage than for any present utility. They had at Captain Vere's orders left their ordinary clothes behind them, and were now attired in thick serviceable jerkins, with skirts coming down nearly to the knee, like those worn by the troops. They marched at the rear of the company, the other pages, similarly attired, following them.

As soon as the troops were on board ship, sail was made, and the vessels dropped down the stream. The wind was very light, and it was not until thirty hours after starting that the little fleet arrived off Sluys. The town, which was nearly egg-shaped, lay close to the river, which was called the Zwin. At the eastern end, in the centre of a detached piece of water, stood the castle, connected with the town by a bridge of boats.

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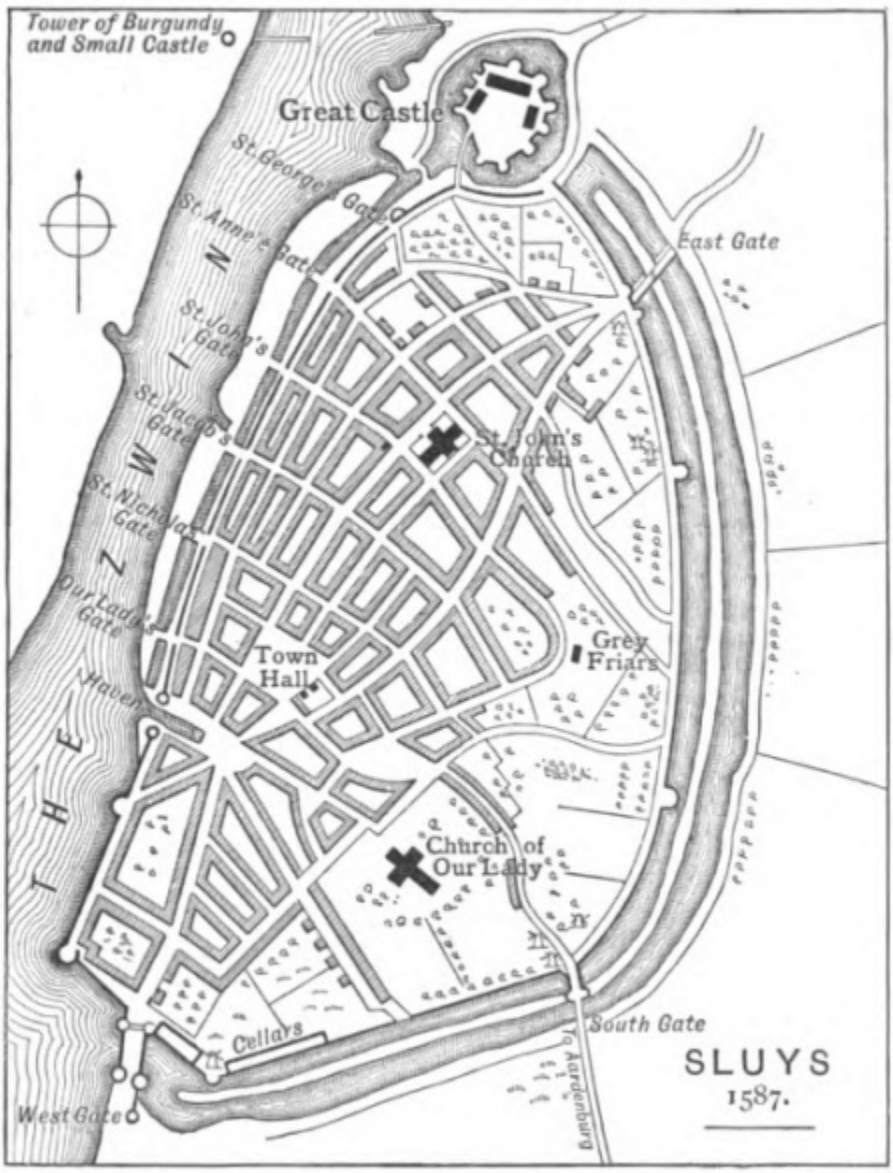
The Zwin formed the defence on the north side, while the south and west were covered by a very wide moat, along the



centre of which ran a dyke, dividing it into two channels. On the west side this moat extended to the Zwin, and was crossed at the point of junction by the bridge leading to the west gate.

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The walls inclosed a considerable space, containing fields and gardens. Seven windmills stood on the ramparts. The tower of the town-hall, and those of the churches of Our Lady, St. John, and the Grey Friars rose high above the town.

The ships from Flushing and Bergen-op-Zoom sailed up together, and the 800 men who landed were received with immense enthusiasm by the inhabitants, who were Protestants, and devoted to the cause of independence. The English were under the command of Sir Roger Williams, who had already seen so many years of service in the Low Countries; and under him were Morgan, Thomas Baskerville, and Huntley, who had long served with him.

Roger Williams was an admirable man for service of this kind. He had distinguished himself by many deeds of reckless bravery. He possessed an inexhaustible fund of confidence and high spirits, and in his company it was impossible to feel despondent, however desperate the situation.

The citizens placed their houses at the disposal of their new allies, handsome quarters were allotted to the officers, and the soldiers were all housed in private dwellings or the warehouses of the merchants. The inhabitants had already for some days been working hard at their defences, and the English at once joined them in their labours, strengthening the weak portions of the walls, mounting cannon upon the towers, and preparing in all ways to give a warm reception to the Spaniards.

Captain Vere, his lieutenant and ensign and his two pages, were quartered in the house of a wealthy merchant, whose family did all in their power to make them comfortable. It was a grand old house, and the boys, accustomed as they were to the splendours of Hedingham Castle, agreed that the simple merchants of the Low Countries were far in advance of English nobles in the comforts and conveniences of their dwellings. The walls of the rooms were all heavily panelled; rich curtains

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hung before the casements. The furniture was not only richly carved, but comfortable. Heavy hangings before the doors excluded draughts, and in the principal apartments Eastern carpets covered the floors. The meals were served on spotless white linen. Rich plate stood on the sideboard, and gold and silver vessels of rare carved work from Italy glittered in the armoires.

Above all, from top to bottom, the house was scrupulously clean. Not a particle of dust dimmed the brightness of the furniture, and even now, when the city was threatened with siege, the merchant's wife never relaxed her vigilance over the doings of her maids, who seemed to the boys to be perpetually engaged in scrubbing, dusting, and polishing.

"Our mother prides herself on the neatness of her house," Geoffrey said; "but what would she say, I wonder, were she to see one of these Dutch households? I fear that the maids would have a hard time of it afterwards, and our father would be fairly driven out of his library."

"It is all very well to be clean," Lionel said; "but I think they carry it too far here. Peace and quietness count for something, and it doesn't seem to me that Dutchmen, fond of it as they say they are, know even the meaning of the words as far as their homes are concerned. Why, it always seems to be cleaning day, and they must be afraid of going into their own houses with their boots on!"

"Yes, I felt quite like a criminal to-day," Geoffrey laughed, "when I came in muddy up to the waist, after working down there by the sluices. I believe when the Spaniards open fire these people will be more distracted by the dust caused by falling tiles and chimneys than by any danger of their lives."

Great difficulties beset the Duke of Parma at the commencement of the siege. Sluys was built upon the only piece of solid ground in the district, and it was surrounded by such a laby-

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rinth of canals, ditches, and swamps, that it was said that it was almost as difficult to find Sluys as it was to capture it. Consequently, it was impossible to find ground solid enough for a camp to be pitched upon, and the first labour was the erection of wooden huts for the troops upon piles driven into the ground. These huts were protected from the fire of the defenders by bags of earth brought in boats from a long distance. The main point selected for the attack was the western gate; but batteries were also placed to play upon the castle and the bridge of boats connecting it with the town.

"There is one advantage in their determining to attack us at the western extremity of the town," John Menyn, the merchant at whose house Captain Vere and his party were lodging, remarked when his guest informed him there was no longer any doubt as to the point at which the Spaniards intended to attack, "for they will not be able to blow up our walls with mines in that quarter."

"How is that?" Francis Vere asked.

"If you can spare half an hour of your time I will show you," the merchant said.

"I can spare it now, Von Menyn," Vere replied; "for the information is important, whatever it may be."

"I will conduct you there at once. There is no time like the present."

"Shall we follow you, sir?" Geoffrey asked his captain.

"Yes, come along," Vere replied. "The matter is of interest, and for the life of me I cannot make out what this obstacle can be of which our host speaks."

They at once set out.

John Menyn led them to a warehouse close to the western wall, and spoke a few words to its owner, who at once took three lanterns from the wall and lighted them, handing one to Vere, another to John Menyn, and taking the other himself;

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he then unlocked a massive door. A flight of steps leading apparently to a cellar were visible. He led the way down, the two men following, and the boys bringing up the rear. The descent was far deeper than they had expected, and when they reached the bottom they found themselves in a vast arched cellar filled with barrels. From this they proceeded into another, and again into a third.

"What are these great magazines?" Francis Vere asked in surprise.

"They are wine-cellars, and there are scores similar to those you see. Sluys is the centre of the wine trade of Flanders and Holland, and cellars like these extend right under the wall. All the warehouses along here have similar cellars. This end of the town was the driest, and the soil most easily excavated. That is why the magazines for wines are all clustered here. There is not a foot of ground behind and under the walls at this end that is not similarly occupied, and if the Spaniards try to drive mines to blow up the walls, they will simply break their way into these cellars, where we can meet them and drive them back again."

"Excellent!" Francis Vere said. "This will relieve us of the work of countermining, which is always tiresome and dangerous, and would be specially so here, where we should have to dive under that deep moat outside your walls. Now we shall only have to keep a few men on watch in these cellars. They would hear the sound of the Spanish approaching, and we shall be ready to give them a warm reception by the time they break in. Are there communications between these cellars?"

"Yes, for the most part," the wine merchant said. "The cellars are not entirely the property of us dealers in wine. They are constructed by men who let them, just as they would let houses. A merchant in a small way would need but one

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cellar, while some of us occupy twenty or more; therefore, there are for the most part communications, with doors, between the various cellars, so that they can be let off in accordance with the needs of the hirers."

"Well, I am much obliged to you for telling me of this," Captain Vere said. "Williams and Morgan will be glad enough to hear that there is no fear of their being blown suddenly into the air while defending the walls, and they will see the importance of keeping a few trusty men on watch in the cellars nearest to the Spaniards. I shall report the matter to them at once. The difficulty," he added smiling, "will be to keep the men wakeful, for it seems to me that the very air is heavy with the fumes of wine."

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CHAPTER IV.

THE SIEGE OF SLUYS.

UNTIL the Spaniards had established their camp, and planted some of their batteries, there was but little firing. Occasionally the wall-pieces opened upon parties of officers reconnoitring, and a few shots were fired from time to time to harass the workmen in the enemy's batteries; but this was done rather to animate the townsmen, and as a signal to distant friends that so far matters were going on quietly, than with any hopes of arresting the progress of the enemy's works. Many sorties were made by the garrison, and fierce fighting took place, but only a score or two of men from each company were taken upon these occasions, and the boys were compelled to remain inactive spectators of the fight.

In these sorties the Spanish works were frequently held for a few minutes, gabions thrown down, and guns overturned, but after doing as much damage as they could the assailants had to fall back again to the town, being unable to resist the masses of pikemen brought up against them. The boldness of these sorties, and the bravery displayed by their English allies, greatly raised the spirits of the townsfolk, who now organized themselves into companies, and undertook the work of guarding the less exposed portion of the wall, thus enabling the garrison to keep their whole strength at the points attacked.

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The townsmen also laboured steadily in adding to the defences; and two companies of women were formed, under female captains, who took the names of May in the Heart and Catherine the Rose. These did good service by building a strong fort at one of the threatened points, and this work was in their honour christened Fort Venus.

"It is scarcely a compliment to Venus," Geoffrey laughed to his brother. "These square-shouldered and heavily-built women do not at all correspond with my idea of the goddess of love."

"They are strong enough for men," Lionel said. "I shouldn't like one of those big fat arms to come down upon my head. No, they are not pretty; but they look jolly and good-tempered, and if they were to fight as hard as they work they ought to do good service."

"There is a good deal of difference between them," Geoffrey said. "Look at those three dark-haired women with neat trim figures. They do not look as if they belonged to the same race as the others."

"They are not of the same race, lad," Captain Vere, who was standing close by, said. "The big heavy women are Flemish, the others come, no doubt, from the Walloon provinces bordering on France. The Walloons broke off from the rest of the states and joined the Spanish almost from the first. They were for the most part Catholics, and had little in common with the people of the Low Country; but there were, of course, many Protestants among them, and these were forced to emigrate, for the Spanish allow no Protestants in the country under their rule. Alva adopted the short and easy plan of murdering all the Protestants in the towns he took; but the war is now conducted on rather more humane principles, and the Protestants have the option given them of changing their faith or leaving the country.

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"In this way, without intending it, the Spaniards have done good service to Holland, for hundreds of thousands of industrious people have flocked there for shelter from Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, and other cities that have fallen into the hands of the Spaniards, thus greatly raising the population of Holland, and adding to its power of defence. Besides this, the presence of these exiles, and the knowledge that a similar fate awaits themselves if they fall again under the yoke of Spain, nerves the people to resist to the utmost. Had it not been for the bigotry of the Spanish, and the abominable cruelties practised by the Inquisition, the States would never have rebelled; and even after they did so, terms might easily have been made with them had they not been maddened by the wholesale massacres perpetrated by Alva. There, do you hear those women speaking? Their language is French rather than Flemish."

Just as they were speaking a heavy roar of cannon broke out from the eastern end of the town.

"They have opened fire on the castle!" Vere exclaimed. "Run, lads, quick! and summon the company to form in the market-place in front of our house. We are told off to reinforce the garrison of the castle in case of attack."

The boys hurried away at the top of their speed. They had the list of all the houses in which the men of the company were quartered; and as the heavy roar of cannon had brought every one to their doors to hear what was going on, the company were in a very short time assembled.

Francis Vere placed himself at their head, and marched them through the long streets of the town and out through the wall on to the bridge of boats. It was the first time the boys had been under fire; and although they kept a good countenance, they acknowledged to each other afterwards that they had felt extremely uncomfortable as they traversed the bridge with the balls whistling over their heads, and sometimes striking

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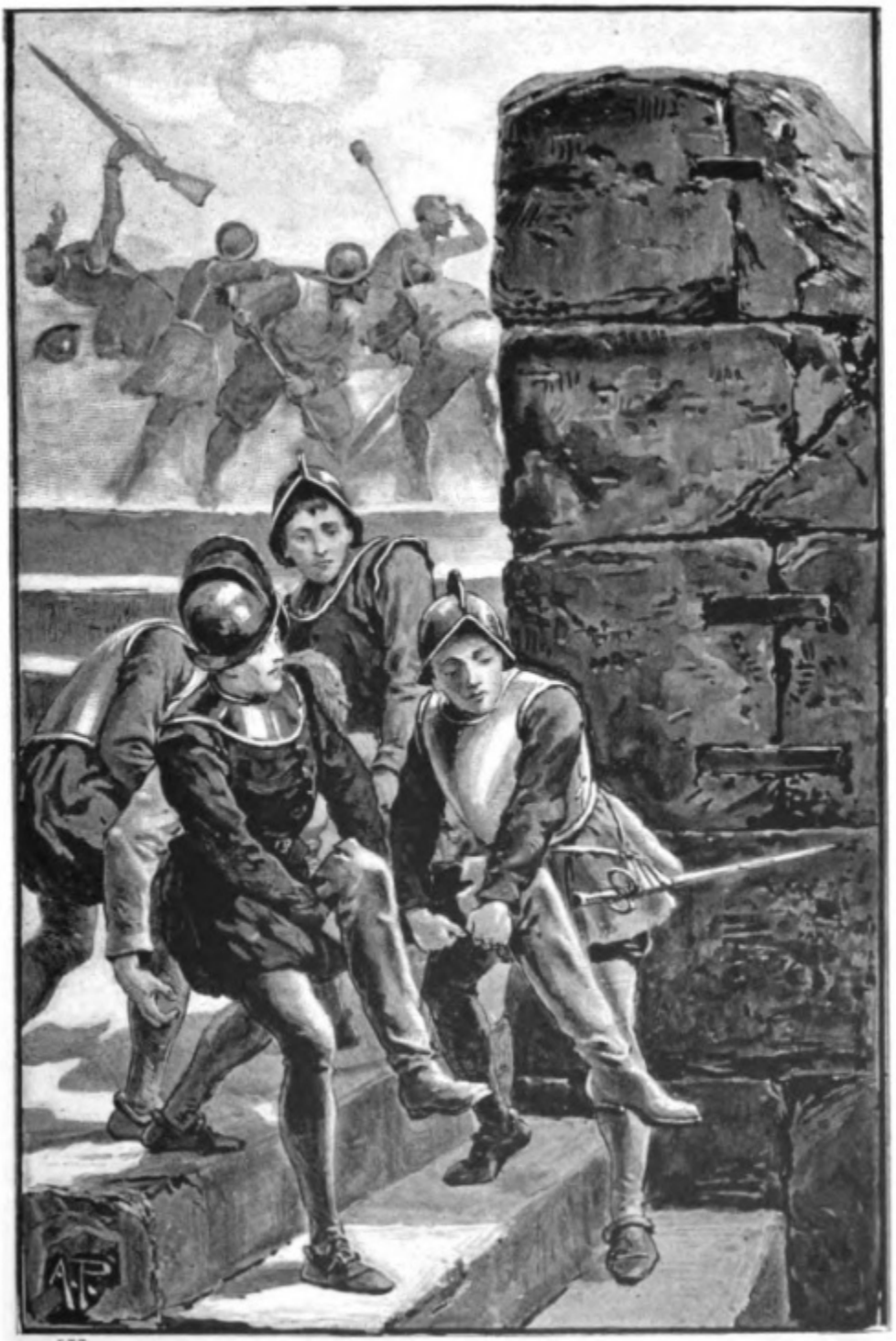

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THE FOUR PAGES CARRY DOWN THE WOUNDED SOLDIER.

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the water close by and sending a shower of spray over the troops.

They felt easier when they entered the castle and were protected by its walls. Upon these the men took their station. Those with guns discharged their pieces against the Spanish artillerymen, the pikemen assisted the bombardiers to work the cannon, and the officers went to and fro encouraging the men. The pages of the company had little to do beyond from time to time carrying cans of wine and water to the men engaged. Geoffrey and Lionel, finding that their services were not required by Captain Vere, mounted on to the wall, and sheltering themselves as well as they could behind the battlements, looked out at what was going on.

"It doesn't seem to me," Geoffrey said, "that these walls will long withstand the balls of the Spanish. The battlements are already knocked down in several places, and I can hear after each shot strikes the walls the splashing of the brickwork as it falls into the water. See! there is Tom Carroll struck down with a ball. It's our duty to carry him away."

They ran along the wall to the fallen soldier. Two other pages came up, and the four carried him to the top of the steps and then down into the court-yard, where a Dutch surgeon took charge of him. His shoulder had been struck by the ball, and the arm hung only by a shred of flesh. The surgeon shook his head.

"I can do nothing for him," he said. "He cannot live many hours."

Lionel had done his share in carrying the man down, but he now turned sick and faint.

Geoffrey caught him by the arm. "Steady, old boy," he said; "it is trying at first, but we shall soon get accustomed to it. Here, take a draught of wine from this flask."

"I am better now," Lionel said, after taking a draught of

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wine. "I felt as if I was going to faint, Geoffrey. I don't know why I should, for I did not feel frightened when we were on the wall."

"Oh, it has nothing to do with fear; it is just the sight of that poor fellow's blood. There is nothing to be ashamed of in that. Why, I saw Will Atkins, who was one of the best fighters and single-stick players in Hedingham, go off in a dead swoon because a man he was working with crushed his thumb between two heavy stones. Look, Lionel, what cracks there are in the wall here. I don't think it will stand long. We had better run up and tell Captain Vere, for it may come toppling down with some of the men on it."

Captain Vere on hearing the news ran down and examined the wall.

"Yes," he said, "it is evidently going. A good earthwork is worth a dozen of these walls. They will soon have the castle about our ears. However, it is of no great importance to us. I saw you lads just now on the wall; I did not care about ordering you down at the time; but don't go up again except to help to carry down the wounded. Make it a rule, my boys, never to shirk your duty, however great the risk to life may be; but, on the other hand, never risk your lives unless it is your duty to do so. What is gallantry in the one case is foolishness in the other. Although you are but pages, yet it may well be that in such a siege as this you will have many opportunities of showing that you are of good English stock; but while I would have you shrink from no danger when there is a need for you to expose yourselves, I say also that you should in no way run into danger wantonly."

Several times in the course of the afternoon the boys took their turn in going up and helping to bring down wounded men. As the time went on several yawning gaps appeared in the walls. The court-yard was strewn with fragments of

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masonry, and the pages were ordered to keep under shelter of the wall of the castle unless summoned on duty. Indeed, the court-yard had now become a more dangerous station than the wall itself; for not only did the cannon-shot fly through the breaches, but fragments of bricks, mortar, and rubbish flew along with a force that would have been fatal to anything struck.

Some of the pages were big fellows of seventeen or eighteen years old, who had been serving for some years under Morgan and Williams, and would soon be transferred into the ranks.

"I like not this sort of fighting," one of them said. "It is all very well when it comes to push of pike with the Spaniards, but to remain here like chickens in a coop while they batter away at us is a game for which I have no fancy. What say you, Master Vickars?"

"Well, it is my first experience, Somers, and I cannot say that it is agreeable. I do not know whether I should like hand-to-hand fighting better; but it seems to me at present that it would be certainly more agreeable to be doing something than to be sitting here and listening to the falls of the pieces of masonry and the whistling of the balls. I don't see that they will be any nearer when they have knocked this place to pieces. They have no boats, and if they had, the guns on the city wall would prevent their using them; besides, when the bridge of boats is removed they could do nothing if they got here."

Towards evening a council was held, all the principal officers being present, and it was decided to evacuate the castle. It could indeed have been held for some days longer, but it was plain it would at length become untenable; the bridge of boats had already been struck in several places, and some of the barges composing it had sunk level with the water. Were it destroyed, the garrison of the castle would be completely cut

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off; and as no great advantage was to be gained by holding the position, for it was evident that it was upon the other end of the town the main attack was to be made, it was decided to evacuate it under cover of night. As soon as it became dark this decision was carried into effect, and for hours the troops worked steadily, transporting the guns, ammunition, and stores of all kinds across from the castle to the town.

Already communication with their friends outside had almost ceased, for the first operation of the enemy had been to block the approach to Sluys from the sea. Boats had been moored head and stern right across Zwin, and a battery erected upon each shore to protect them; but Captains Hart and Allen twice swam down to communicate with friendly vessels below the obstacle, carrying despatches with them from the governor to the States-General, and from Roger Williams to the English commanders, urging that no time should be lost in assembling an army to march to the relief of the town.

Both contained assurances that the garrison would defend the place to the last extremity, but pointed out that it was only a question of time, and that the town must fall unless relieved. The Dutch garrison were 800 strong, and had been joined by as many English. Parma had at first marched with but 6000 men against the city, but had very speedily drawn much larger bodies of men towards him, and had, as Roger Williams states in a letter to the queen sent from Sluys at an early period of the siege, four regiments of Walloons, four of Germans, one of Italians, one of Burgundians, fifty-two companies of Spaniards, twenty-four troops of horse, and forty-eight guns. This would give a total of at least 17,000 men, and further reinforcements afterwards arrived.

Against so overwhelming a force as this, it could not be hoped that the garrison, outnumbered by more than ten to one, could long maintain themselves, and the Duke of Parma

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looked for an easy conquest of the place. By both parties the possession of Sluys was regarded as a matter of importance out of all proportion to the size and population of the town; for at that time it was known in England that the King of Spain was preparing a vast fleet for the invasion of Britain, and Sluys was the nearest point to our shores at which a fleet could gather and the forces of Parma embark to join those coming direct from Spain. The English, therefore, were determined to maintain the place to the last extremity; and while Parma had considered its capture as an affair of a few days only, the little garrison were determined that for weeks at any rate they would be able to prolong the resistance, feeling sure that before that time could elapse both the States and England, knowing the importance of the struggle, would send forces to their relief.

The view taken as to the uselessness of defending the castle was fully justified, as the Spaniards on the following day removed the guns that they had employed in battering it, to their works facing the western gate, and fire was opened next morning. Under cover of this the Spanish engineers pushed their trenches up to the very edge of the moat, in spite of several desperate sorties by the garrison. The boys had been forbidden by Captain Vere to take their place with the company on the walls.

"In time," he said, "as our force decreases, we shall want every one capable of handling arms to man the breaches, but at present we are not in any extremity; and none save those whom duty compels to be there must come under the fire of the Spaniards, for to do so would be risking life without gain."

They had, however, made friends with the wine merchant whose cellars they had visited, and obtained permission from him to visit the upper storey of his warehouse whenever they chose. From a window here they were enabled to watch all

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that was taking place, for the warehouse was much higher than the walls. It was not in the direct line of fire of the Spanish batteries, for these were chiefly concentrated against the wall a little to their right. After heavy fighting the Spaniards one night, by means of boats from the Zwin, landed upon the dyke which divided the moat into two channels, and thus established themselves so close under the ramparts that the guns could not be brought to bear upon them. They proceeded to intrench themselves at once upon the dyke.

The governor, Arnold Groenvelt, consulted with the English leaders, and decided that the enemy must be driven off this dyke immediately, or that the safety of the city would be gravely imperilled. They therefore assembled a force of four hundred men, sallied out of the south gate, where two bastions were erected on the dyke itself, and then advanced along it to the assault of the Spaniards. The battle was a desperate one, the English and Dutch were aided by their comrades on the wall, who shot with guns and arquebuses against the Spaniards, while the latter were similarly assisted by their friends along the outer edge of the moat, and received constant reinforcements by boats from their ships.

The odds were too great for the assailants, who were forced at last to fall back along the dyke to the south gate and to re-enter the town. It was already five weeks since the English had arrived to take part in the defence, and the struggle now began upon a great scale—thirty cannon and eight culverins opening fire upon the walls. The heaviest fire was on St. James' day, the 25th of July, when 4000 shots were fired between three in the morning and five in the afternoon. While this tremendous cannonade was going on, the boys could not but admire the calmness shown by the population. Many of the shots, flying over the top of the walls, struck the houses in the city, and the chimneys, tiles, and masses of masonry fell in the

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streets. Nevertheless the people continued their usual avocations. The shops were all open, though the men employed served their customers with breast and back pieces buckled on, and their arms close at hand, so that they could run to the walls at once to take part in their defence did the Spaniards attempt an assault upon them. The women stood knitting at their doors, Frau Menyn looked as sharply after her maids as ever, and washing and scouring went on without interruption.

"I believe that woman will keep those girls at work after the Spaniards have entered the city, and until they are thundering at the door," Lionel said. "Who but a Dutch woman would give a thought to a few particles of dust on her furniture when an enemy was cannonading the town?"

"I think she acts wisely after all, Lionel. The fact that everything goes on as usual here and in other houses takes people's thoughts off the dangers of the position, and prevents anything like panic being felt."

The lads spent the greater part of the day at their look-out, and could see that the wall against which the Spanish fire was directed was fast crumbling. Looking down upon it, it seemed deserted of troops, for it would be needlessly exposing the soldiers to death to place them there while the cannonade continued; but behind the wall, and in the street leading to it, companies of English and Dutch soldiers could be seen seated or lying on the ground.

They were leaning out of the dormer-window in the high roof watching the Spanish soldiers in the batteries working their guns, when, happening to look round, they saw a cross-bow protruded from a window of the warehouse to their right, and a moment afterwards the sharp twang of the bow was heard. There was nothing unusual in this; for although firearms were now generally in use the long-bow and the cross-bow had not been entirely abandoned, and there were

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still archers in the English army, and many still held that the bow was a far better weapon than the arquebus, sending its shafts well nigh as far and with a truer aim.

"If that fellow is noticed," Geoffrey said, "we shall have the Spanish musketeers sending their balls in this direction. The governor has, I heard Captain Vere say, forbidden shooting from the warehouses, because he does not wish to attract the Spanish fire against them. Of course when the wall yields and the breach has to be defended the warehouses will be held, and as the windows will command the breach they will be great aids to us then, and it would be a great disadvantage to us if the Spaniards now were to throw shells and fire-balls into these houses, and so to destroy them before they make their attack. Nor can much good be gained, for at this distance a cross-bow would scarce carry its bolts beyond the moat."

"Most likely the man is using the cross-bow on purpose to avoid attracting the attention of the Spaniards, Geoffrey. At this distance they could not see the cross-bow, while a puff of smoke would be sure to catch their eye."

"There, he has shot again. I did not see the quarrell fall in the moat. See, one of the Spanish soldiers from that battery is coming forward. There, he has stooped and picked something up. Hallo! do you see that? He has just raised his arm; that is a signal, surely."

"It certainly looked like it," Lionel agreed. "It was a sort of half wave of the hand. That is very strange!"

"Very, Lionel; it looks to me very suspicious. It is quite possible that a piece of paper may have been tied round the bolt, and that someone is sending information to the enemy. This ought to be looked to."

"But what are we to do, Geoffrey? Merely seeing a Spanish soldier wave his arm is scarcely reason enough for bringing an

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accusation against anyone. We are not even sure that he picked up the bolt; and even if he did, the action might have been a sort of mocking wave of the hand at the failure of the shooter to send it as far as the battery."

"It might be, of course, Lionel. No, we have certainly nothing to go upon that would justify our making a report on the subject, but quite enough to induce us to keep a watch on this fellow, whoever he may be. Let us see, to begin with, if he shoots again."

They waited for an hour, but the head of the cross-bow was not again thrust out of the window.

"He may have ceased shooting for either of two reasons," Geoffrey said. "If he is a true man, because he sees that his bolts do not carry far enough to be of any use. If he is a traitor, because he has gained his object, and knows that his communication has reached his friends outside. We will go down now and inquire who is the occupier of the next warehouse."

The merchant himself was not below, for as he did business with other towns he had had nothing to do since Sluys was cut off from the surrounded country; but one of his clerks was at work, making out bills and accounts in his office as if the thunder of the guns outside was unheard by him. The boys had often spoken to him as they passed in and out.

"Who occupies the warehouse on the right?" Geoffrey asked him carelessly.

"William Arnig," he replied. "He is a leading citizen, and one of the greatest merchants in our trade. His cellars are the most extensive we have, and he does a great trade in times of peace with Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, and other towns."

"I suppose he is a Protestant like most of the towns-people?" Geoffrey remarked.

"No, he is a Catholic; but he is not one who pushes his

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opinions strongly, and he is well disposed to the cause, and a captain in one of the city bands. The Catholics and Protestants always dwell quietly together throughout the Low Countries, and would have no animosities against each other were it not for the Spaniards. Formerly, at least, this was the case; but since the persecutions we have Protestant towns and Catholic towns, the one holding to the States cause, the other siding with the Spaniards. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I hadn't heard the name of your next neighbour, and was wondering who he might be."

The boys had now been nearly two months in Holland, and were beginning to understand the language, which is not difficult to acquire, and differed then even less than now from the dialect spoken in the eastern counties of England, between whom and Holland there had been for many generations much trade and intimate relations.

"What had we better do next, Geoffrey?" Lionel asked as they left the warehouse.

"I think that in the first place, Lionel, we will take our post at the window to-morrow, and keep a close watch all day to see whether this shooting is repeated. If it is, we had better report the matter to Captain Vere, and leave him to decide what should be done. I do not see that we could undertake anything alone, and in any case, you see, it would be a serious matter to lay an accusation against a prominent citizen who is actually a captain of one of the bands."

Upon the following day they took their post again at the window, and after some hours watching saw three bolts fired from the next window. Watching intently, they saw the two first fall into the moat. They could not see where the other fell; but as there was no splash in the water, they concluded that it had fallen beyond it, and in a minute they saw a soldier again advance from the battery, pick up something at the edge

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of the water, raise his arm, and retire. That evening when Captain Vere returned from the ramparts they informed him of what they had observed.

"Doubtless it is an act of treachery," he said, "and this merchant is communicating with the enemy. At the same time what you have seen, although convincing evidence to me, is scarce enough for me to denounce him. Doubtless he does not write these letters until he is ready to fire them off, and were he arrested in his house or on his way to the warehouse we might fail to find proofs of his guilt, and naught but ill-feeling would be caused among his friends. No, whatever we do we must do cautiously. Have you thought of any plan by which we might catch him in the act?"

"If two or three men could be introduced into his warehouse, and concealed in the room from which he fires, they might succeed in catching him in the act, Captain Vere; but the room may be an empty one without any place whatever where they could be hidden, and unless they were actually in the room they would be of little good, for he would have time, if he heard footsteps, to thrust any letter he may have written into his mouth, and so destroy it before it could be seized."

"That is so," Captain Vere agreed. "The matter seems a difficult one, and yet it is of the greatest importance to hinder communications with the Spaniards. To-night all the soldiers who can be spared, aided by all the citizens able to use matlock and pick, are to set to work to begin to raise a half-moon round the windmill behind the point they are attacking, so as to have a second line to fall back upon when the wall gives way, which it will do ere long, for it is sorely shaken and battered. It is most important to keep this from the knowledge of the Spaniards. Now, lads, you have shown your keeness by taking notice of what is going on, see if you cannot go further, and hit upon some plan of catching this traitor at

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his work. If before night we can think of no scheme, I must go to the governor and tell him frankly that we have suspicions of treachery, though we cannot prove them, and ask him, in order to prevent the possibility of our plans being communicated to the enemy, to place some troops in all the warehouses along that line, so that none can shoot therefrom any message to the Spaniards."

Just as Captain Vere finished his supper, the boys came into the room again.

"We have thought of a plan, sir, that might succeed, although it would be somewhat difficult. The dormer-window from which these bolts have been fired lies thirty or forty feet away from that from which we were looking. The roof is so steep that no one could hold a footing upon it for a moment, nor could a plank be placed upon which he could walk. The window is about twelve feet from the top of the roof. We think that one standing on the ledge of our window might climb on to its top, and once there swing a rope with a stout grapnel attached to catch on the ridge of the roof; then two or three men might climb up there and work themselves along, and then lower themselves down with a rope on to the top of the next window. They would need to have ropes fastened round their bodies, for the height is great, and a slip would mean death.

"The one farthest out on the window could lean over when he hears a noise below him, and when he saw the cross-bow thrust from the window, could by a sudden blow knock it from the fellow's hand, when it would slide down the roof and fall into the narrow yard between the warehouse and the walls. Of course some men would be placed there in readiness to seize it, and others at the door of the warehouse to arrest the traitor if he ran down."

"I think the plan is a good one, though somewhat difficult

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of execution," Captain Vere said. "But this enterprise on the roof would be a difficult one and dangerous, since as you say a slip would mean death."

"Lionel and myself, sir, would undertake that with the aid of two active men to hold the ropes for us. We have both done plenty of bird-nesting in the woods of Hedingham, and are not likely to turn giddy."

"I don't think it is necessary for more than one to get down on to that window," Captain Vere said. "Only one could so place himself as to look down upon the cross-bow. However, you shall divide the honour of the enterprise between you. You, as the eldest and strongest, Geoffrey, shall carry out your plan on the roof, while you, Lionel, shall take post at the door with four men to arrest the traitor when he leaves. I will select two strong and active men to accompany you, Geoffrey, and aid you in your attempt; but mind, before you try to get out of the window and to climb on to its roof, have a strong rope fastened round your body and held by the others; then in case of a slip, they can haul you in again. I will see that the ropes and grapnels are in readiness."

The next morning early Geoffrey proceeded with the two men who had been selected to accompany him to his usual look-out. Both were active, wiry men, and entered fully into the spirit of the undertaking when Geoffrey explained its nature to them. They looked out of the dormer-window at the sharp roof slanting away in front of them and up to the ridge above.

"I think, Master Vickars," one of them, Roger Browne by name, said, "that I had best go up first. I served for some years at sea, and am used to climbing about in dizzy places. It is no easy matter to get from this window-sill astride the roof above us, and moreover I am more like to heave the grapnel so that it will hook firmly on to the ridge than you are."

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"Very well, Roger. I should be willing to try, but doubtless you would manage it far better than I should. But before you start we will fasten the other rope round your body, as Captain Vere directed me to do. Then in case you slip, or anything gives way with your weight, we can check you before you slide far down below us."

A rope was accordingly tied round the man's body under his arms. Taking the grapnel, to which the other rope was attached, he got out on to the sill. It was not an easy task to climb up on to the ridge of the dormer-window, and it needed all his strength and activity to accomplish the feat. Once astride of the ridge the rest was easy. At the first cast he threw the grapnel so that it caught securely on the top of the roof. After testing it with two or three pulls he clambered up, leaving the lower end of the rope hanging by the side of the window. As soon as he had gained this position Geoffrey, who was to follow him, prepared to start.

According to the instructions Browne had given him he fastened the end of the rope which was round Browne's body under his own shoulders, then leaning over and taking a firm hold of the rope to which the grapnel was attached, he let himself out of the window. Browne hauled from above at the rope round his body, and he pulled himself with his hands by that attached to the grapnel, and presently reached the top.

"I am glad you came first, Roger," he said. "I do not think I could have ever pulled myself up if you had not assisted me."

He unfastened the rope, and the end was thrown down to the window, and Job Tredgold, the other man, fastened it round him and was hauled up as Geoffrey had been.

"We will move along now to that stack of chimneys coming through the roof four feet below the ridge on the town side," Geoffrey said. "We can stand down there out of sight of the Spaniards. We shall be sure to attract attention sitting up

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here, and might have some bullets flying round our ears, besides which this fellow's friends might suspect our object and signal to him in some way. It is two hours yet to the time when we have twice seen him send his bolts across the moat."

This was accordingly done, and for an hour and a half they sat down on the roof with their feet against the stack of chimneys.

"It is time to be moving now," Geoffrey said at last. "I think the best way will be for me to get by the side of the dormer-window instead of above it. It would be very awkward leaning over there, and I should not have strength to strike a blow; whereas with the rope under my arms and my foot on the edge of the sill, which projects a few inches beyond the side of the window, I could stand upright and strike a downright blow on the cross-bow."

"That would be the best way, I think," Roger Browne agreed; "and I will come down on to the top of the window and lean over. In the first place your foot might slip, and as you dangle there by the rope he might cut it and let you shoot over, or he might lean out and shoot you as you climb up the roof again; but if I am above with my pistol in readiness there will be no fear of accidents."

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CHAPTER V.

AN HEROIC DEFENCE.

THE plan Roger Browne suggested was carried out. Geoffrey was first lowered to his place by the side of the window, and bracing himself against its side with a foot on the sill he managed to stand upright, leaning against the rope that Job Tredgold held from above. Job had instructions when Geoffrey lifted his arm to ease the rope a few inches so as to enable the lad to lean forward. After two or three attempts Geoffrey got the rope to the exact length which would enable him to look round the corner and to strike a blow with his right hand, in which he held a stout club. Roger Browne then descended by the aid of the other rope, and fastening it round his body lay down astride of the roof of the window with his head and shoulders over the end, and his pistol held in readiness.

It seemed an age to Geoffrey before he heard the sound of a footstep in the loft beside him. He grasped his cudgel firmly and leaned slightly forward. For ten minutes there was quiet within, and Geoffrey guessed that the traitor was writing the missive he was about to send to the enemy; then the footstep approached the window, and a moment later a cross-bow was thrust out. A glance at it sufficed to show that the bolt was enveloped in a piece of paper wound round it and secured with a string. Steadying himself as well as he could Geoffrey struck

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with all his force down upon the cross-bow. The weapon, loosely held, went clattering down the tiles. There was an exclamation of surprise and fury from within the window, and at the same moment Job Tredgold, seeing that Geoffrey's attempt had been successful, hauled away at the rope and began to drag him backward up the tiles.

The lad saw a man lean out of the window and look up at him, then a pistol was levelled; but the report came from above the window, and not from the threatening weapon. A sharp cry of pain was heard, as the pistol fell from the man's hand and followed the cross-bow down the roof. A few seconds later Geoffrey was hauled up to the ridge, where he was at once joined by Roger Browne. Shifting the ropes they moved along till above the window from which they had issued. Geoffrey was first lowered down. As soon as he had got in at the window he undid the rope and Job Tredgold followed him, while Roger Browne slid down by the rope attached to the grapnel; then they ran downstairs.

As soon as they sallied out below they saw that Lionel and the men with him had captured a prisoner; and just as they joined the party the guard came round from the other side of the warehouse, bringing with them the cross-bow, its bolt, and the pistol. The prisoner, whose shoulder was broken by Roger Browne's shot, was at once taken to Captain Vere's quarters. That officer had just arrived from the walls, knowing the time at which the capture would probably be made.

"So you have succeeded," he said. "Well done, lads; you have earned the thanks of all. We will take this man at once to the governer, who is at present at the town-hall."

By the time they issued out quite a crowd had assembled, for the news that William von Arnig had been brought a prisoner and wounded to Captain Vere's quarters had spread rapidly. The crowd increased as they went along, and Captain Vere and

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his party had difficulty in making their way to the town-hall, many of the people exclaiming loudly against this treatment of one of the leading citizens. The governor was, when they entered, holding council with the English leader, Sir Roger Williams.

"Why, what is this, Captain Vere?" he asked in surprise as that officer, accompanied by the two boys and followed by Roger Browne and Job Tredgold guarding the prisoner, entered.

"I have to accuse this man of treacherously communicating with the enemy," Francis Vere said.

"What?" Arnold de Groenvelt exclaimed in surprise. "Why, this is Mynheer von Arnig, one of our most worshipful citizens! Surely, Captain Vere, there must be some error here?"

"I will place my evidence before you," Captain Vere said; "and it will be for you to decide upon it. Master Geoffrey Vickars, please to inform the governor what you know about this matter."

Geoffrey then stated how he and his brother, being at the upper window of the warehouse, had on two days in succession seen a cross-bow discharged from a neighbouring window, and had noticed a Spanish soldier come out of a battery and pick up something which they believed to be the bolt, and how he and his brother had reported the circumstances to Captain Vere. That officer then took up the story, and stated that seeing the evidence was not conclusive, and it was probable that if an attempt was made to arrest the person, whomsoever he might be, who had used the cross-bow, any evidence of treasonable design might be destroyed before he was seized, he had accepted the offer of Master Vickars to climb the roof, lower himself to the window from which the bolt would be shot, and, if possible, strike it from the man's hands, so that it would fall down the roof to the court-yard below, where men were placed to seize it.

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Geoffrey then related how he, with the two soldiers guarding the prisoner, had scaled the roof and taken a position by the window; how he had seen the cross-bow thrust out, and had struck it from the hands of the man holding it; how the latter had leaned out, and would have shot him had not Roger Browne from his post above the window shot him in the shoulder.

"Here are the cross-bow and pistol," Captain Vere said; "and this is the bolt as it was picked up by my men. You see, sir, there is a paper fastened round it. I know not its contents, for I judged it best to leave it as it was found until I placed it in your hands."

The governor cut the string, unrolled the paper and examined it. It contained a statement as to the state of the wall, with remarks where it was yielding, and where the enemy had best shoot against it. It said that the defenders had in the night begun to form a half-moon behind it, and contained a sketch showing the exact position of the new work.

"Gentlemen, what think you of this?" the governor asked the English officers.

"There can be no doubt that it is a foul act of treachery," Williams said, "and the traitor merits death."

"We will not decide upon it ourselves," the governor said. "I will summon six of the leading citizens, who shall sit as a jury with us. This is a grave matter, and touches the honour of the citizens as well as the safety of the town."

In a few minutes the six citizens summoned arrived. The evidence was again given, and then the prisoner was asked what he had to say in his defence.

"It is useless for me to deny it," he replied. "I am caught in the act, and must suffer for it. I have done my duty to the King of Spain, my sovereign; and I warn you he will take vengeance for my blood."

"That we must risk," the governor said. "Now, gentlemen,

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you citizens of this town now attacked by the Spaniards, and you, sir, who are in command of the soldiers of the Queen of England, have heard the evidence and the answer the prisoner has made. What is your opinion thereon? Do you, Sir Roger Williams, being highest in rank and authority, first give your opinion."

"I find that he is guilty of an act of gross treason and treachery. For such there is but one punishment—death." And the six citizens all gave the same decision.

"You are found guilty of this foul crime," the governor said, "and are sentenced to death. In half an hour you will be hung in the market-place, as a punishment to yourself and a warning to other traitors, if such there be in this town of Sluys. As to you, young sirs, you have rendered a great service to the town, and have shown a discernment beyond your years. I thank you in the name of the city and of its garrison, and also in that of the States, whose servant I am."

A guard of armed citizens were now called in, the prisoner was handed to them, and orders given to their officer to carry the sentence into effect. A statement of the crime of the prisoner, with the names of those who had acted as his judges, and the sentence, was then drawn out, signed by the governor, and ordered by him to be affixed to the door of the town-hall. The two lads, finding that they were no longer required, hastened back to their quarters, having no wish to be present at the execution of the unhappy wretch whose crime they had been the means of detecting.

A few days later considerable portions of the battered wall fell, and shortly afterwards a breach of two hundred and fifty paces long was effected, and a bridge of large boats constructed by the enemy from the dyke to the foot of the rampart.

This was not effected without terrible loss. Hundreds of the bravest Spanish soldiers and sailors were killed, and three officers

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who succeeded each other in command of the attack were badly wounded. The Spanish had laboured under great difficulties owing to the lack of earth to push their trenches forward to the edge of the moat, arising from the surrounding country being flooded. They only succeeded at last by building wooden machines of bullet-proof planks on wheels, behind each of which four men could work. When all was prepared the Spaniards advanced to the attack, rushing up the breach with splendid valour, headed by three of their bravest leaders; but they were met by the English and Dutch, and again and again hurled back.

Day and night the fighting continued, the Spaniards occasionally retiring to allow their artillery to open fire again upon the shattered ruins. But stoutly as the defenders fought, step by step the Spaniards won their way forward until they had captured the breach and the west gate adjoining it, there being nothing now beyond the hastily-constructed inner work between them and the town. The finest regiment of the whole of the Spanish infantry now advanced to the assault, but they were met by the defenders—already sadly diminished in numbers, but firm and undaunted as ever,—and their pikes and their axes well supplied the place of the fallen walls.

Assault after assault was met and repulsed, Sir Roger Williams, Thomas Baskerville, and Francis Vere being always in the thick of the fight. Baskerville was distinguished by the white plumes of his helmet, Vere by his crimson mantle; and the valour of these leaders attracted the admiration of the Duke of Parma himself, who watched the fight from the summit of the tower of the western gate. Francis Vere was twice wounded, but not disabled. Sir Roger Williams urged him to retire, but he replied that he would rather be killed ten times in a breach than once in a house.

Day by day the terrible struggle continued. The Spaniards

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were able constantly to bring up fresh troops, but the defenders had no relief. They were reduced in numbers from 1600 to 700 men, and yet for eighteen days they maintained the struggle, never once leaving the breach.

The pages brought their food to them, and when the attacks were fiercest joined in the defence, fighting as boldly and manfully as the soldiers themselves. Geoffrey and Lionel kept in close attendance upon Francis Vere, only leaving him to run back to their quarters and bring up the meals cooked for him and his two officers by Frau Menyn and her handmaids. Both kept close to him during the fighting. They knew that they were no match in strength for the Spanish pikemen; but they had obtained pistols from the armoury, and with these they did good service, several times freeing him from some of his assailants when he was sorely pressed. On one occasion when Francis Vere was smitten down by a blow from an axe, the boys rushed forward and kept back his assailants until some of the men of the company came to his aid.

"You have done me brave service indeed," Captain Vere said to them when he recovered; for his helmet had defended him from serious injury, though the force of the blow had felled him. "It was a happy thought of mine when I decided to bring you with me. This is not the first time that you have rendered me good service, and I am sure you will turn out brave and valiant soldiers of the queen."

When each assault ceased the weary soldiers threw themselves down behind the earthen embankment, and obtained such sleep as they could before the Spaniards mustered for fresh attack. When, after eighteen days' terrible fighting, the Duke of Parma saw that even his best troops were unable to break through the wall of steel, he desisted from the assault and began the slower process of mining. The garrison from their look-out beheld the soldiers crossing the bridge with picks and shovels, and prepared

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to meet them in this new style of warfare. Captain Uvedale was appointed to command the men told off for this duty, and galleries were run from several of the cellars to meet those of the enemy.

As every man was employed either on the rampart or in mining, many of the pages were told off to act as watchers in the cellars, and to listen for the faint sounds that told of the approach of the enemy's miners. As the young Vickars were in attendance on the officers, they were exempted from this work; but they frequently went down into the cellars, both to watch the process of mining by their own men and to listen to the faint sounds made by the enemy's workmen. One day they were sitting on two wine-kegs, watching four soldiers at work at the end of a short gallery that had been driven towards the Spaniards. Suddenly there was an explosion, the miners were blown backwards, the end of the gallery disappeared, and a crowd of Walloon soldiers almost immediately afterwards rushed in.

The boys sprang to their feet and were about to fly, when an idea occurred to Geoffrey. He seized a torch, and, standing by the side of a barrel placed on end by a large tier, shouted in Dutch, "Another step forward and I fire the magazine!" The men in front paused. Through the fumes of smoke they saw dimly the pile of barrels and a figure standing with a lighted torch close to one of them. A panic seized them, and believing they had made their way into a powder-magazine, and that in another instant there would be a terrible explosion, they turned with shouts of "A magazine! a magazine! Fly, or we are all dead men!"

"Run, Lionel, and get help," Geoffrey said, and in two or three minutes a number of soldiers ran down into the cellar.

The Walloons were not long before they recovered from their panic. Their officers knew that the wine-cellars of the city

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were in front of them, and reassured them as to the character of the barrels they had seen. They were, however, too late, and a furious conflict took place at the entrance into the cellar, but the enemy, able only to advance two or three abreast, failed to force their way in.

Captain Uvedale and Francis Vere were soon on the spot, and when at last the enemy, unable to force an entrance, fell back, the former said, "This is just as I feared. You see, the Spaniards drove this gallery, and ceased to work immediately they heard us approaching them. We had no idea that they were in front of us, and so they only had to put a barrel of powder there and fire it as soon as there was but a foot or two of earth between us and them."

"But how was it," Francis Vere asked, "that when they fired it they did not at once rush forward? They could have captured the whole building before we knew what had happened."

"That I cannot tell," Captain Uvedale replied. "The four men at work must have been either killed or knocked senseless. We shall know better another time, and will have a strong guard in each cellar from which our mines are being driven."

"If it please you, Captain Uvedale," Lionel said, "it was my brother Geoffrey who prevented them from advancing; for indeed several of them had already entered the cellar, and the gallery behind was full of them."

"But how did he do that?" Captain Uvedale asked in surprise.

Lionel related the ruse by which Geoffrey had created a panic in the minds of the Spaniards.

"That was well thought of indeed, and promptly carried out!" Captain Uvedale exclaimed. "Francis, these pages of yours are truly promising young fellows. They detected that rascally Dutchman who was betraying us. I noticed them

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several times in the thick of the fray at the breach; and now they have saved the city by their quickness and presence of mind; for had these Spaniards once got possession of this warehouse they would have speedily broken a way along through the whole tier, and could then have poured in upon us with all their strength."

"That is so, indeed," Francis Vere agreed. "They have assuredly saved the town, and there is the greatest credit due to them. I shall be glad, Uvedale, if you will report the matter to our leader. You are in command of the mining works, and it will come better from you than from me who am their captain."

Captain Uvedale made his report, and both Sir Roger Williams and the governor thanked the boys, and especially Geoffrey, for the great service they had rendered.

Very shortly the galleries were broken into in several other places, and the battle became now as fierce and continuous down in the cellars as it had before been on the breach. By the light of torches, in an atmosphere heavy with the fumes of gunpowder, surrounded by piled-up barrels of wine, the defenders and assailants maintained a terrible conflict, men staggering up exhausted by their exertion and by the stifling atmosphere while others took their places below, and so, night and day, the desperate struggle continued.

All these weeks no serious effort had been made for the relief of the hardly beleaguered town. Captains Hall and Allen had several times swum down at night through the bridge of boats with letters from the governor entreating a speedy succour. The States had sent a fleet which sailed some distance up the Zwin, but returned without making the slightest effort to break through the bridge of boats. The Earl of Leicester had advanced with a considerable force from Ostend against the fortress of Blankenburg, but had retreated hastily as soon as

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Parma despatched a portion of his army against him; and so the town was left to its fate.

The last letter that the governor despatched said that longer resistance was impossible. The garrison were reduced to a mere remnant, and these utterly worn out by constant fighting and the want of rest. He should ask for fair and honourable terms, but if these were refused the garrison and the whole male inhabitants in the city, putting the women and children in the centre, would sally out and cut their way through, or die fighting in the midst of the Spaniards. The swimmer who took the letter was drowned, but his body was washed ashore and the letter taken to the Duke of Parma.

Three days afterwards a fresh force of the enemy embarked in forty large boats, and were about to land on an unprotected wharf by the river-side when Arnold de Groenvelt hung out the white flag. His powder was exhausted and his guns disabled, and the garrison so reduced that the greater portion of the walls were left wholly undefended. The Duke of Parma, who was full of admiration at the extraordinary gallantry of the defenders, and was doubtless also influenced by the resolution expressed in his letter by the governor, granted them most honourable terms. The garrison were to march out with all their baggage and arms, with matches lighted and colours displayed. They were to proceed to Breskans, and there to embark for Flushing. The life and property of the inhabitants were to be respected, and all who did not choose to embrace the Catholic faith were to be allowed to leave the town peaceably, taking with them their belongings, and to go wheresoever they pleased.

When the gates were opened the garrison sallied out. The Duke of Parma had an interview with several of the leaders, and expressed his high admiration of the valour with which they had fought, and said that the siege of Sluys had cost him

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more men than he had lost in the four principal sieges he had undertaken in the Low Country put together. On the 4th of August the duke entered Sluys in triumph, and at once began to make preparations to take part in the great invasion of England for which Spain was preparing.

After their arrival at Flushing Captains Vere, Uvedale, and others, who had brought their companies from Bergen-op-Zoom to aid in the defence of Sluys, returned to that town.

The Earl of Leicester shortly afterwards resigned his appointment as general of the army. He had got on but badly with the States-General, and there was from the first no cordial co-operation between the two armies. The force at his disposal was never strong enough to do anything against the vastly superior armies of the Duke of Parma, who was one of the most brilliant generals of his age, while he was hampered and thwarted by the intrigues and duplicity of Elizabeth, who was constantly engaged in half-hearted negotiations now with France and now with Spain, and whose capricious temper was continually overthrowing the best-laid plans of her councillors and paralysing the actions of her commanders. It was not until she saw her kingdom threatened by invasion that she placed herself fairly at the head of the national movement, and inspired her subjects with her energy and determination.

Geoffrey Vickars had been somewhat severely wounded upon the last day of the struggle in the cellar, a Spanish officer having beaten down his guard and cleft through his morion. Lionel was unwounded, but the fatigue and excitement had told upon him greatly, and soon after they arrived at Bergen Captain Vere advised both of them to return home for a few months.

"There is nothing likely to be doing here until the spring. Parma has more serious matter in hand. They talk, you know, of invading England, and after his experience at Sluys I do not

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think he will be wasting his force by knocking their heads against stone walls. I should be glad if I could return too, but I have my company to look after and must remain where I am ordered; but as you are but volunteers and giving your service at your pleasure, and are not regularly upon the list of the pages of the company, I can undertake to grant you leave, and indeed I can see that you both greatly need rest. You have begun well and have both done good service, and have been twice thanked by the governor of Sluys and Sir Roger Williams.

"You will do yourselves no good by being shut up through the winter in this dull town, and as there is a vessel lying by the quay which is to set sail to-morrow, I think you cannot do better than go in her. I will give you letters to my cousin and your father saying how well you have borne yourselves, and how mightily Sir Roger Williams was pleased with you. In the spring you can rejoin, unless indeed the Spaniards should land in England, which Heaven forfend, in which case you will probably prefer to ride under my cousin's banner at home."

The boys gladly accepted Francis Vere's proposal. It was but three months since they had set foot in Holland, but they had gone through a tremendous experience, and the thought of being shut up for eight or nine months at Bergen-op-Zoom was by no means a pleasant one. Both felt worn-out and exhausted, and longed for the fresh keen air of the eastern coast. Therefore the next morning they embarked on board ship. Captain Vere presented them each with a handsome brace of pistols in token of his regard, and Captains Uvedale, Baskerville, and other officers who were intimate friends of Vere's, and had met them at his quarters, gave them handsome presents in recognition of the services they had rendered at Sluys.

The ship was bound for Harwich, which was the nearest English port. Landing there, they took passage by boat to

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Manningtree and thence by horse home, where they astounded their father and mother by their sudden appearance.

"And this is what comes of your soldiering," Mrs. Vickars said when the first greeting was over. "Here is Geoffrey with plasters all over the side of his head, and you, Lionel, looking as pale and thin as if you had gone through a long illness. I told your father when we heard of your going that you ought to be brought back and whipped; but the earl talked him over into writing to Captain Francis to tell him that he approved of this mad-brained business, and a nice affair it has turned out."

"You will not have to complain of our looks, mother, at the end of a week or two," Geoffrey said. "My wound is healing fast, and Lionel only needs an extra amount of sleep for a time. You see, for nearly a month we were never in bed, but just lay down to sleep by the side of Captain Vere on the top of the ramparts, where we had been fighting all day."

"It was a gallant defence," Mr. Vickars said, "and all England is talking of it. It was wonderful that 800 English and as many Dutchmen should hold a weak place for two months against full twelve times their number of Spaniards, led by the Duke of Parma himself, and there is great honour for all who took part in the defence. The governor and Sir Roger Williams especially mentioned Francis Vere as among the bravest and best of their captains, and although you as pages can have had nought to do with the fighting, you will have credit as serving under his banner."

"I think, father," Geoffrey said, touching the plasters on his head, "this looks somewhat as if we had had something to do with the fighting, and here is a letter for you from Captain Vere which will give you some information about it."

Mr. Vickars adjusted his horn spectacles on his face and opened the letter. It began:

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"My dear Master and Friend,—I have had no means of writing to you since your letter came to me, having had other matters in hand, and being cut off from all communication with England. I was glad to find that you did not take amiss my carrying off of your sons. Indeed that action has turned out more happily than might have been expected, for I own that they were but young for such rough service.

"However, they have proved themselves valiant young gentlemen. They fought stoutly by my side during our long tussle with the Spaniards, and more than once saved my life by ridding me of foes who would have taken me at a disadvantage. Once, indeed, when I was down from a blow on the pate from a Spanish axe, they rushed forward and kept my assailants at bay until rescue came. They discovered a plot between a traitor in the town and the Spaniards, and succeeded in defeating his plans and bringing him to justice.

"They were also the means of preventing the Spaniards from breaking into the great wine-cellars and capturing the warehouses, and for each of these services they received the thanks of the Dutch governor and of Sir Roger Williams, our leader. Thus, you see, although so young they have distinguished themselves mightily, and should aught befall me, there are many among my friends who will gladly take them under their protection and push them forward. I have sent them home for a time to have quiet and rest, which they need after their exertions, and have done this the more willingly since there is no chance of fighting for many months to come. I hope that before the Spaniards again advance against us I may have them by my side."

"Well, well, this is wonderful," Mrs. Vickars said when her husband had finished reading the letter. "If they had told me themselves I should not have believed them, although they have never been given to the sin of lying; but since it is writ in

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Master Vere's own hand it cannot be doubted. And now tell us all about it, boys."

"We will tell you when we have had dinner, mother. This brisk Essex air has given us both an appetite, and until that is satisfied you must excuse us telling a long story. Is the earl at the castle, father? because we have two letters to him from Captain Francis—one, I believe, touching our affairs, and the other on private matters. We have also letters from him to his mother and his brother John, and these we had better send off at once by a messenger, as also the private letters to the earl."

"That I will take myself," Mr. Vickars said. "I was just going up to him to speak about my parish affairs when you arrived."

"You had better have your dinner first," Mrs. Vickars said decidedly. "When you once get with the earl and begin talking you lose all account of the time, and only last week kept dinner waiting for two hours. It is half-past eleven now, and I will hurry it on so that it will be ready a few minutes before noon."

"Very well, my dear; but I will go out into the village at once and find a messenger to despatch to Crepping Hall with the letters to Dame Elizabeth and John Vere."

The boys' story was not told until after supper, for as soon as dinner was over Mr. Vickars went up to the castle with the letters for the earl. The latter, after reading them, told him that his cousin spoke most highly of his two sons, and said they had been of great service, even as far as the saving of his life. The earl told Mr. Vickars to bring the boys up next day to see him in order that he might learn a full account of the fighting at Sluys, and that he hoped they would very often come in, and would, while they were at home, practise daily with his master of arms at the castle. "I know, Mr. Vickars, that you had hoped that one of them would enter the church; but you

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see that their tastes lie not in that direction, and it is evident that, as in the case of my cousin Francis, they are cut out for soldiers."

"I am afraid so," Mr. Vickars said; "and I must let them have their own way, for I hold that none should be forced to follow the ministry save those whose natural bent lies that way."

"I don't think they have chosen badly," the earl said. "My cousin Francis bids fair to make a great soldier, and as they start in life as his pages they will have every chance of getting on, and I warrant me that Francis will push their fortunes. Perhaps I may be able to aid them somewhat myself. If aught comes of this vapouring of the Spaniards, before the boys return to Holland, they shall ride with me. I am already arming all the tenantry and having them practised in warlike exercises, and in the spring I shall fit out two ships at Harwich to join the fleet that will put to sea should the Spaniards carry out their threats of invading us."

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CHAPTER VI.

THE LOSS OF THE "SUSAN."

THERE were few people in Hedingham more pleased to see the two lads on their return than John Lirriper, to whom they paid a visit on the first day they went out.

"I am glad to see you back, young masters; though, to say the truth, you are not looking nigh so strong and well as you did when I last parted from you."

"We shall soon be all right again, John. We have had rather a rough time of it over there in Sluys."

"Ah, so I have heard tell, Master Geoffrey. Your father read out from the pulpit a letter the earl had received from Captain Francis telling about the fighting, and it mentioned that you were both alive and well and had done good service; but it was only a short letter sent off in haste the day after he and the others had got out of the town. I was right glad when I heard it, I can tell you, for there had been nought talked of here but the siege; and though your lady mother has not said much to me, I always held myself ready to slip round the corner or into a house when I saw her come down the street, for I knew well enough what was in her mind. She was just saying to herself, 'John Lirriper, if it hadn't been for you my two boys would not be in peril now. If aught comes to them, it will be your doing.' And though it was not my fault, as far

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as I could see, for Captain Francis took you off my hands, as it were, and I had no more to say in the matter than a child, still, there it was, and right glad was I when I heard that the siege was over and you were both alive.

"I had a bad time of it, I can tell you, when I first got back, young sirs, for your mother rated me finely; and though your father said it was not my fault in any way, she would not listen to him, but said she had given you into my charge, and that I had no right to hand you over to any others save with your father's permission—not if it were to the earl himself,—and for a long time after she would make as if she didn't see me if she met me in the street. When my wife was ill about that time she sent down broths and simples to her, but she sent them by one of the maids, and never came herself save when she knew I was away in my boat.

"However, the day after the reading of that letter she came in and said she was sorry she had treated me hardly, and that she had known at heart all along that it was not altogether my fault, and asked my pardon as nice as if I had been the earl. Of course I said there was nothing to ask pardon for, and indeed that I thought it was only natural she should have blamed me, for that I had often blamed myself, though not seeing how I could have done otherwise. However, I was right glad when the matter was made up, for it is not pleasant for a man when the parson's wife sets herself against him."

"It was certainly hard upon you, John," Geoffrey said; "but I am sure our mother does not in any way blame you now. You see, we brought home letters from Captain Vere, or rather Sir Francis, for he has been knighted now, and he was good enough to speak very kindly of what we were able to do in the siege. Mother did not say much, but I am sure that at heart she is very grateful, for the earl himself came down to the Rectory and spoke warmly about us, and said that he should

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always be our fast friend, because we had given his cousin some help when he was roughly pressed by the Spaniards. I hope we shall have another sail with you in a short time, for we are not going back to the Netherlands at present, as things are likely to be quiet there now. Although he did not say so, I think Sir Francis thought that we were over-young for such rough work, and would be more useful in a year's time; for, you see, in these sieges even pages have to take their share in the fighting, and when it comes to push of pike with the Spaniards more strength and vigour are needed than we possess at present. So we are to continue our practice at arms at the castle, and to take part in the drilling of the companies the earl is raising in case the Spaniards carry out their threat of invading England."

Mrs. Vickars offered no objection whatever the first time Geoffrey asked permission to go down to Bricklesey with John Lirriper.

"I have no objection, Geoffrey; and, indeed, now that you have chosen your own lives and are pages to Sir Francis Vere, it seems to me that in matters of this kind you can judge for yourself. Now that you have taken to soldiering and have borne your part in a great siege, and have even yourselves fought with the Spaniards, I deem it that you have got beyond my wing, and must now act in all small matters as it pleases you; and that since you have already run great danger of your lives, and may do so again ere long, it would be folly of me to try to keep you at my apron-strings and to treat you as if you were still children."

So the two lads often accompanied John Lirriper to Bricklesey, and twice sailed up the river to London and back in Joe Chambers' smack, these jaunts furnishing a pleasant change to their work of practising with pike and sword with the men-at-arms at the castle, or learning the words of command and the work of officers in drilling the newly-raised corps. One day

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John Lirriper told them that his nephew was this time going to sail up the Medway to Rochester, and would be glad to take them with him if they liked it; for they were by this time prime favourites with the master of the *Susan*. Although their mother had told them that they were at liberty to go as they pleased, they nevertheless always made a point of asking permission before they went away.

"If the wind is fair we shall not be long away on this trip, mother. Two days will take us up to Rochester; we shall be a day loading there, and shall therefore be back on Saturday if the wind serves, and may even be sooner if the weather is fine and we sail with the night tides, as likely enough we shall, for the moon is nearly full, and there will be plenty of light to keep our course free of the sands."

The permission was readily given. Mrs. Vickars had come to see that it was useless to worry over small matters, and therefore nodded cheerfully, and said she would give orders at once for a couple of chickens to be killed and other provision prepared for their voyage.

"I doubt you are going to have a rougher voyage than usual this time, young masters," John Lirriper said when the boat was approaching Bricklesey. "The sky looks wild, and I think there is going to be a break in the weather. However, the *Susan* is a stout boat, and my nephew a careful navigator."

"I should like a rough voyage for a change, John," Geoffrey said. "We have always had still water and light winds on our trips, and I should like a good blow."

"Well, I think you will have one; though may be it will only come on thick and wet. Still I think there is wind in those clouds, and that if it does come it will be from the south-east, in which case you will have a sharp buffeting. But you will make good passage enough down to the Nore once you are fairly round the Whittaker."

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"Glad to see you, young masters," Joe Chambers said as the boat came alongside his craft. "You often grumbled at the light winds, but unless I am mistaken we shall be carrying double reefs this journey. What do you think, Uncle John?"

"I have been saying the same, lad; still there is no saying. You will know more about it in a few hours' time."

It was evening when the boys went on board the *Susan*, and as soon as supper was over they lay down, as she was to start at daybreak the next morning. As soon as they were roused by the creaking of the blocks and the sound of trampling of feet overhead they went up on deck. Day had just broken; the sky was overspread by dark clouds.

"There is not much wind after all," Geoffrey said as he looked round.

"No, it has fallen light during the last two hours," the skipper replied, "but I expect we shall have plenty before long. However, we could do with a little more now."

Tide was half out when they started. Joe Chambers had said the night before that he intended to drop down to the edge of the sands and there anchor, and to make across them past the Whittaker Beacon into the channel as soon as there was sufficient water to enable him to do so. The wind was light, sometimes scarcely sufficient to belly out the sails and give the boat steerage way, at others coming in short puffs which heeled her over and made her spring forward merrily.

Before long the wind fell lighter and lighter, and at last Joe Chambers ordered the oars to be got out.

"We must get down to the edge of the Buxey," he said, "before the tide turns, or we shall have it against us, and with this wind we should never be able to stem it, but should be swept up the Crouch. At present it is helping us, and with a couple of hours' rowing we may save it to the Buxey."

The boys helped at the sweeps, and for two hours the creaking

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of the oars and the dull flapping of the sail alone broke the silence of the calm; and the lads were by no means sorry when the skipper gave the order for the anchor to be dropped.

"I should like to have got about half a mile further," he said; "but I can see by the landmarks that we are making no way now. The tide is beginning to suck in."

"How long will it be before we have water enough to cross the Spit?" Lionel asked as they laid in the oars.

"Well nigh four hours, Master Lionel. Then, even if it keeps a stark calm like this, we shall be able to get across the sands and a mile or two up the channel before we meet the tide. There we must anchor again till the first strength is past, and then if the wind springs up we can work along at the edge of the sands against it. There is no tide close in to the sands after the first two hours. But I still think this is going to turn into wind presently; and if it does it will be sharp and heavy, I warrant. It's either that or rain."

The sky grew darker and darker until the water looked almost black under a leaden canopy.

"I wish we were back into Bricklesey," Joe Chambers said. "I have been well-nigh fifteen years going backwards and forwards here, and I do not know that ever I saw an awkwarder look about the sky. It reminds me of what I have heard men who have sailed to the Indies say they have seen there before a hurricane breaks. If it was not that we saw the clouds flying fast overhead when we started, I should have said it was a thick sea fog that had rolled in upon us. Ah, there is the first drop. I don't care how hard it comes down so that there is not wind at the tail of it. A squall of wind before rain is soon over; but when it follows rain you will soon have your sails close-reefed. You had best go below or you will be wet through in a minute."

The great drops were pattering down on the deck and causing

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splashes as of ink on the surface of the oily-looking water. Another half minute it was pouring with such a mighty roar on the deck that the boys below needed to shout to make each other heard. It lasted but five minutes, and then stopped as suddenly as it began. The lads at once returned to the deck.

"So it is all over, Master Chambers."

"Well the first part is over, but that is only a sort of a beginning. Look at that light under the clouds away to the south of east. That is where it is coming from, unless I am mistaken. Turn to and get the mainsail down, lads," for although after dropping anchor the head sails had been lowered, the main and mizzen were still on her.

The men set to work, and the boys helped to stow the sail and fasten it with the tiers. Suddenly there was a sharp puff of wind. It lasted a few seconds only, then Joe Chambers pointed towards the spot whence a hazy light seemed to come.

"Here it comes," he said. "Do you see that line of white water. That is a squall and no mistake. I am glad we are not under sail."

There was a sharp, hissing sound as the line of white water approached them, and then the squall struck them with such force and fury that the lads instinctively grasped at the shrouds. The mizzen had brought the craft in a moment head-to-wind, and Joe Chambers and the two sailors at once lowered it and stowed it away.

"Only put a couple of tiers on," the skipper shouted. "We may have to upsail again if this goes on."

The sea got up with great rapidity, and a few minutes after the squall had struck them the *Susan* was beginning to pitch heavily. The wind increased in force, and seemed to scream rather than whistle in the rigging.

"The sea is getting up fast!" Geoffrey shouted in the skipper's ear as he took his place close to him.

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"It won't be very heavy yet," Joe Chambers replied; "the sands break its force. But the tide has turned now, and as it makes over the sand there will be a tremendous sea here in no time; that is if this wind holds, and it seems to me that it is going to be an unusual gale altogether."

"How long will it be before we can cross the Spit?"

"We are not going to cross to-day, that's certain," the skipper said. "There will be a sea over those sands that would knock the life out of the strongest craft that ever floated. No, I shall wait here for another hour or two if I can, and then slip my cable and run for the Crouch. It is a narrow channel, and I never care about going into it after dark until there is water enough for a craft of our draught over the sands. It ain't night now, but it is well nigh as dark. There is no making out the bearings of the land, and we have got to trust to the perches the fishermen put up at the bends of the channel. However, we have got to try it. Our anchors would never hold here when the sea gets over the sands, and if they did they would pull her head under water."

In half an hour a sea had got up that seemed to the boys tremendous. Dark as it was they could see in various directions tracts of white water where the waves broke wildly over the sands. The second anchor had been let go some time before. The two cables were as taut as iron bars, and the boat was pulling her bows under every sea. Joe Chambers dropped a lead-line overboard and watched it closely.

"We are dragging our anchors," he said. "There is nothing for it but to run."

He went to the bow, fastened two logs of wood by long lines to the cables outside the bow, so that he could find and recover the anchors on his return, then a very small jib was hoisted, and as it filled two blows with an axe severed the cables inboard. The logs attached to them were thrown over, and the skipper

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ran aft and put up the helm as the boat's head payed off before the wind. As she did so a wave struck her and threw tons of water on board, filling her deck nearly up to the rails. It was well Joe had shouted to the boys to hold on, for had they not done so they would have been swept overboard.

Another wave struck them before they were fairly round, smashing in the bulwark and sweeping everything before it, and the boys both thought that the *Susan* was sinking under their feet. However she recovered herself. The water poured out through the broken bulwark, and the boat rose again on the waves as they swept one after another down upon her stern. The channel was well marked now, for the sands on either side were covered with breaking water. Joe Chambers shouted to the sailors to close-reef the mizzen and hoist it, so that he might have the boat better under control. The wind was not directly astern but somewhat on the quarter; and small as was the amount of sail shown, the boat lay over till her lee-rail was at times under water; the following waves yawing her about so much that it needed the most careful steering to prevent her from broaching to.

"It seems to me as the wind is northering!" one of the men shouted.

The skipper nodded and slackened out the sheet a bit as the wind came more astern. He kept his eyes fixed ahead of him, and the men kept gazing through the gloom.

"There is the perch," one of them shouted presently, "just on her weather-bow!"

The skipper nodded and held on the same course until abreast of the perch, which was only a forked stick. The men came aft and hauled in the mizzen sheet. Chambers put up the helm. The mizzen came across with a jerk, and the sheet was again allowed to run out. The jib came over with a report like the shot of a cannon, and at the same moment split into streamers.

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"Hoist the foresail!" the skipper shouted, and the men sprang forward and seized the halliards; but at this moment the wind seemed to blow with a double fury, and the moment the sail was set it too split into ribbons.

"Get up another jib!" Joe Chambers shouted, and one of the men sprang below. In half a minute he reappeared with another sail.

"Up with it quick, Bill. We are drifting bodily down on the sand."

Bill hurried forward. The other hand had hauled in the traveller, to which the bolt-rope of the jib was still attached, and hauling on this had got the block down and in readiness for fastening on the new jib. The sheets were hooked on, and then while one hand ran the sail out with the out-haul to the bowsprit end, the other hoisted with the halliards. By this time the boat was close to the broken water. As the sail filled her head payed off towards it. The wind lay her right over, and before she could gather way there was a tremendous crash. The *Susan* had struck on the sands. The next wave lifted her, but as it passed on she came down with a crash that seemed to shake her in pieces. Joe Chambers relaxed his grasp of the now useless tiller.

"It is all over," he said to the boys. "Nothing can save her now. If she had been her own length farther off the sands she would have gathered way in time. As it is another ten minutes and she will be in splinters."

She was now lying over until her masthead was but a few feet above water. The seas were striking her with tremendous force, pouring a deluge of water over her.

"There is but one chance for you," he went on. "The wind is dead on the shore, and Foulness lies scarce three miles to leeward."

He went into the cabin and fetched out a small axe fastened

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"THE NEXT FEW MINUTES IT WAS A WILD STRUGGLE FOR LIFE."

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in the companion where it was within reach of the helmsman. Two blows cut the shrouds of the mizzen, a few vigorous strokes were given to the foot of the mast, and, as the boat lifted and crashed down again on the sand, it broke off a few inches above the deck.

"Now, lads, I will lash you loosely to this. You can both swim, and with what aid it will give you may well reach the shore. There are scarce three feet of water here, and except where one or two deeps pass across it there is no more anywhere between this and the land. It will not be rough very far. Now, be off at once; the boat will go to pieces before many minutes. I and the two men will take to the mainmast, but I want to see you off first."

Without hesitation the boys pushed off with the mast. As they did so a cataract of water poured over the smack upon them, knocking them for a moment under the surface with its force.

For the next few minutes it was a wild struggle for life. They found at once that they were powerless to swim in the broken water, which, as it rushed across the sand, impelled alike by the rising tide behind it and the force of the wind, hurried them along at a rapid pace, breaking in short steep waves. They could only cling to the mast and snatch a breath of air from time to time as it rolled over and over. Had they not been able to swim they would very speedily have been drowned; but, accustomed as they were to diving, they kept their presence of mind, holding their breath when under water and breathing whenever they were above it with their faces to the land. It was only so that they could breathe, for the air was thick with spray, which was swept along with such force by the wind that it would have drowned the best swimmer who tried to face it as speedily as if he had been under water.

After what seemed to them an age the waves became somewhat less violent, though still breaking in a mass of foam.

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Geoffrey loosed his hold of the spar and tried to get to his feet. He was knocked down several times before he succeeded, but when he did so found that the water was little more than two feet deep, although the waves rose to his shoulders. The soft mud under his feet rendered it extremely difficult to stand, and the rope which attached him to the spar, which was driving before him, added to the difficulty. He could not overtake the mast, and threw himself down again and swam to it.

"Get up, Lionel!" he shouted; "we can stand here." But Lionel was too exhausted to be capable of making the effort. With the greatest difficulty Geoffrey raised him to his feet and supported him with his back to the wind.

"Get your breath again!" he shouted. "We are over the worse now and shall soon be in calmer water. Get your feet well out in front of you, if you can, and dig your heels into the mud, then you will act as a buttress to me and help me to keep my feet."

It was two or three minutes before Lionel was able to speak. Even during this short time they had been carried some distance forward, for the ground on which they stood seemed to be moving, and the force of the waves carried them constantly forward.

"Feel better, old fellow?" Geoffrey asked, as he felt Lionel making an effort to resist the pressure of the water.

"Yes, I am better now," Lionel said.

"Well, we will go on as we are as long as we can; let us just try to keep our feet and give way to the sea as it takes us along. The quicker we go the sooner we shall be in shallower water; but the tide is rising fast, and unless we go on it will speedily be as bad here as it was where we started."

As soon as Lionel had sufficiently recovered they again took to the spar; but now, instead of clasping it with their arms and legs, they lay with their chest upon it, and used their efforts

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only to keep it going before the wind and tide. Once they came to a point where the sand was but a few inches under water. Here they stood up for some minutes, and then again proceeded on foot until the water deepened to their waists.

Their progress was now much more easy, for the high bank had broken the run of the surf. The water beyond it was much smoother, and they were able to swim, pushing the spar before them.

"We are in deep water," Geoffrey said presently, dropping his feet. "It is out of my depth. Chambers said there was a deep channel across the sands not far from the island; so in that case the shore cannot be far away."

In another quarter of an hour the water was again waist-deep. Geoffrey stood up.

"I think I see a dark line ahead, Lionel; we shall soon be there."

Another ten minutes and the water was not above their knees. They could see the low shore now at a distance of but a few hundred yards ahead, and untying the ropes under their arms they let the spar drift on, and waded forward until they reached the land. There was a long mud bank yet to cross, and exhausted as they were it took them a long time to do this; but at last they came to a sandy bank rising sharply some ten feet above the flat. They threw themselves down on this and lay for half an hour without a word being spoken.

"Now, Lionel," Geoffrey said at last, raising himself to a sitting position, "we must make an effort to get on and find a shelter. There are people living in the island. I have heard that they are a wild set, making their living by the wrecks on these sands and by smuggling goods without paying dues to the queen. Still, they will not refuse us shelter and food, and assuredly there is nothing on us to tempt them to plunder us."

He rose to his feet and helped Lionel up. Once on the top

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of the bank a level country stretched before them. The wind aided their footsteps, sweeping along with such tremendous force that at times they had difficulty in keeping their feet. As they went on they came upon patches of cultivated land, with hedgerows and deep ditches. Half a mile further they perceived a house. On approaching it they saw that it was a low structure of some size with several out-buildings. They made their way to it and knocked at the door. They knocked twice before it was opened, then some bolts were withdrawn. The door was opened a few inches. A man looked out, and seeing two lads opened it widely.

"Well, who are you, and what do you want?" he asked roughly.

"We have been wrecked in a storm on the sands. We were sailing from Bricklesey for Sheerness when the storm caught us."

The man looked at them closely. Their pale faces and evidently exhausted condition vouched for the truth of their story.

"The house is full," he said gruffly, "and I cannot take in strangers. You will find some dry hay in that out-house, and I will bring you some food there. When you have eaten and drunk you had best journey on."

So saying he shut the door in their faces.

"This is strange treatment," Geoffrey said. "I should not have thought a man would have refused shelter to a dog such a day as this. What do you say, Lionel, shall we go on?"

"I don't think I can go any further until I have rested, Geoffrey," Lionel replied faintly. "Let us lie down in shelter if it is only for half an hour. After that, if the man brings us some food as he says, we can go on again."

They went into the shed the man had pointed out. It was half full of hay.

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"Let us take our things off and wring them, Lionel, and give ourselves a roll in the hay to dry ourselves. We shall soon get warm after that."

They stripped, wrung the water from their clothes, rolled themselves in the hay until they felt a glow of returning warmth, and then put on their clothes again. Scarcely had they done so when the man came in with a large tankard and two hunks of bread.

"Here," he said, "drink this and then be off. We want no strangers hanging round here."

At any other time the boys would have refused hospitality so cheerlessly offered, but they were too weak to resist the temptation. The tankard contained hot-spiced ale, and a sensation of warmth and comfort stole over them as soon as they had drunk its contents and eaten a few mouthfuls of bread. The man stood by them while they ate.

"Are you the only ones saved from the wreck?" he asked.

"I trust that we are not," Geoffrey replied. "The master of the boat tied us to a mast as soon as she struck, and he and the two men with him were going to try to get to shore in the same way."

As soon as they had finished they stood up and handed the tankard to the man.

"I am sorry I must turn you out," he said, as if somewhat ashamed of his want of courtesy. "Any other day it would be different, but to-day I cannot take anyone in."

"I thank you for what you have given us," Geoffrey said. "Can you tell us which is the way to the ferry?"

"Follow the road and it will take you there. About a couple of miles. You cannot mistake the way."

Feeling greatly strengthened and refreshed the lads again started.

"This is a curious affair," Geoffrey said, "and I cannot make

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out why they should not let us in. However, it does not matter much. I feel warm all over now, in spite of my wet clothes."

"So do I," Lionel agreed. "Perhaps there were smugglers inside, or some fugitives from justice hiding there. Anyhow, I am thankful for that warm ale; it seems to have given me new life altogether."

They had walked a quarter of a mile, when they saw four horsemen coming on the road. They were closely wrapped up in cloaks, and as they passed, with their heads bent down to meet the force of the gale and their broad-brimmed hats pulled low down over their eyes, the boys did not get even a glimpse of their features.

"I wonder who they can be," Geoffrey said, looking after them. "They are very well mounted, and look like persons of some degree. What on earth can they be doing in such a wretched place as this? They must be going to that house we left, for I noticed the road stopped there."

"It is curious, Geoffrey, but it is no business of ours."

"I don't know that, Lionel. You know there are all sorts of rumours about of Papist plots, and conspirators could hardly choose a more out-of-the way spot than this to hold their meetings. I should not be at all surprised if there is some mischief on foot."

Half a mile further three men on foot met them, and these, like the others, were closely wrapped up to the eyes.

"They have ridden here," Geoffrey said after they had passed. "They have all high riding-boots on; they must have left their horses on the other side of the ferry. See, there is a village a short distance ahead. We will go in there and dry our clothes, and have a substantial meal if we can get it. Then we will talk this business over."

The village consisted of a dozen houses only, but among them

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was a small public-house. Several men were sitting by the fire with pots of ale before them.

"We have been wrecked on the coast, landlord, and have barely escaped with our lives. We want to dry our clothes and to have what food you can give us."

"I have plenty of eggs," the landlord said, "and my wife will fry them for you; but we have no meat in the house. Fish and eggs are the chief food here. You are lucky in getting ashore, for it is a terrible gale. It is years since we have had one like it. As to drying your clothes, that can be managed easy enough. You can go up into my room and take them off, and I will lend you a couple of blankets to wrap yourselves in, and you can sit by the fire here until your things are dry."

A hearty meal of fried eggs and another drink of hot ale completed the restoration of the boys. Their clothes were speedily dried, for the landlady had just finished baking her week's batch of bread, and half an hour in the oven completely dried the clothes. They were ready almost as soon as the meal was finished. Many questions were asked them as to the wreck, and the point at which they had been cast ashore.

"It was but a short distance from a house at the end of this road," Geoffrey said. "We went there for shelter, but they would not take us in, though they gave us some bread and hot ale."

Exclamations of indignation were heard among the men sitting round.

"Ralph Hawker has the name of being a surly man," one said, "but I should not have thought that he would have turned a shipwrecked man from his door on such a day as this. They say he is a Papist, though whether he be or not I cannot say; but he has strange ways, and there is many a stranger passes the ferry and asks for his house. However, that is no affair of mine, though I hold there is no good in secret ways."

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"That is so," another said; "but it goes beyond all reason for a man to refuse shelter to those the sea has cast ashore such a day as this."

As soon as they had finished their meal and again dressed themselves, the lads paid their reckoning and went out. Scarcely had they done so when two horsemen rode up, and, drawing rein, inquired if they were going right for the house of one Ralph Hawker.

"It lies about a mile on," Geoffrey said. "You cannot miss the way; the road ends there."

As he spoke a gust of wind of extra fury blew off one of the riders' hats. It was stopped by the wall of a house a few yards away. Geoffrey caught it and handed it to the horseman. With a word of thanks he pressed it firmly on his head, and the two men rode on.

"Did you notice that?" Geoffrey asked his brother. "He has a shaven spot on the top of his head. The man is a Papist priest in disguise. There is something afoot, Lionel. I vote that we try and get to the bottom of it."

"I am ready if you think so, Geoffrey. But it is a hazardous business, you know; for we are unarmed, and there are, we know, seven or eight of them at any rate."

"We must risk that," Geoffrey said; "besides, we can run if we cannot fight. Let us have a try whatever comes of it."

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CHAPTER VII.

A POPISH PLOT.

THERE was no one about, for the wind was blowing with such fury that few cared to venture out of doors, and the boys therefore started back along the road by which they had come, without being observed.

"We had better strike off from the road," Geoffrey said, "for some more of these men may be coming along. Like enough someone will be on the watch at the house, so we had best make a long detour, and when we get near it come down on it from the other side. You know we saw no windows there."

"That is all well enough," Lionel agreed; "but the question is, how are we to hear what they are saying inside? We are obliged to shout to catch each others' words now, and there is not the least chance of our hearing anything through the closed shutters."

"We must wait till we get there, and then see what is to be done, Lionel. We managed to detect a plot at Sluys, and we may have the same luck here."

After half an hour's brisk walking they again approached the house from the side at which they had before come upon it, and where, as Geoffrey observed, there were no windows; they made their way cautiously up to it, and then moved quietly round to the side. Here there were two windows on

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the ground floor. The shutters were closed, for glass was unknown except in the houses of the comparatively wealthy. Its place was taken by oiled paper, and this in bad weather was protected by outer shutters. Geoffrey stole out a few paces to look at the window above.

"It is evidently a loft," he said as he rejoined Lionel. "You can see by the roof that the rooms they live in are entirely upon the ground floor. If we can get in there we might possibly hear what is going on below. The rooms are not likely to be ceiled, and there are sure to be cracks between the planks through which we can see what is going on below. The noise of the wind is so great there is little chance of their hearing us. Now, let us look about for something to help us to climb up."

Lying by an out-house close by they found a rough ladder, composed of a single pole with bits of wood nailed on to it a foot apart. This they placed up against the door of the loft. They could see that this was fastened only by a hasp, with a piece of wood put through the staple. It had been arranged that Geoffrey only should go up, Lionel removing the pole when he entered, and keeping watch behind the out-house lest anyone should come round the house. Both had cut heavy sticks as they came along to give them some means of defence. Lionel stood at the pole, while Geoffrey climbed up, removed the piece of wood from the staple, and then holding the hasp to prevent the wind blowing in the door with a crash, entered the loft. A glance showed him that it extended over the whole of the house, and that it was entirely empty.

He closed the door behind him, and jammed it with a couple of wedges of wood he had cut before mounting; then he lay down on the rough planks and began to crawl along. He saw a gleam of light at the further end, and felt sure that it proceeded from the room in which the party were assembled.

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Although he had little fear of being heard owing to the din kept up by the wind, he moved along with extreme care until he reached the spot whence the light proceeded. As he had anticipated, it was caused by lights in a room below streaming through the cracks between the rough planking.

Rising on to his knees he looked round, and then crawled to a crack that appeared much wider than the rest, the boards being more than half an inch apart. Lying down over it, he was able to obtain a view of a portion of the room below. He could see a part of a long table, and looked down upon the heads of five men sitting on one side of it. He now applied his ear to the crevice. A man was speaking, and in the intervals between the gusts of wind which shook the house to its foundation, he could hear what was said.

"It is no use hesitating any longer, the time for action has arrived—Jezebel must be removed—interests of our holy religion—little danger in carrying out the plan that has been proposed. Next time—Windsor—road passes through wood near Datchet—a weak guard overpowered—two told off to execute — free England from tyranny — glory and honour throughout Catholic world. England disorganized and without a head could offer no resistance—as soon as day fixed—meet at Staines at house of—final details and share each man is to—done, scatter through country, readiness for rising—Philip of Spain—"

This was the last sentence Geoffrey caught, for when the speaker ceased a confused and general talk took place, and he could only catch a word here and there without meaning or connection. He therefore drew quietly back to the door of the loft and opened it. He thought first of jumping straight down, but in that case he could not have fastened the door behind him. He therefore made a sign to Lionel, who was anxiously peering round the corner of the out-house. The pole was

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placed into position, and pulling the door after him and re-fastening the latch he made his way down to the ground, replaced the pole at the place from which they had taken it, and then retired in the direction from which they had come.

"Well, what have you heard, Geoffrey?" Lionel asked. "Was it worth the risk you have run?"

"Well worth it, Lionel. I could only hear a little of what was said, but that was quite enough to show that a plot is on foot to attack and kill the queen the next time she journeys to Windsor. The conspirators are to hide in a wood near Datchet."

"You don't say so, Geoffrey. That is important news indeed. What are we to do next?"

"I have not thought yet," Geoffrey replied. "I should say, though, our best plan would be to make our way back as quickly as we can by Burnham and Maldon round to Hedingham. The earl was going up to London one day this week, we may catch him before he starts; if not, we must, of course, follow him. But at any rate it is best to go home, for they will be in a terrible fright, especially if Joe Chambers or one of the men take the news to Bricklesey of the loss of the *Susan*, for it would be quickly carried up to Hedingham by John Lirriper or one or other of the boatmen. No day seems to be fixed, and the queen may not be going to Windsor for some little time, so the loss of a day will not make any difference. As we have money in our pockets we can hire horses at Burnham to take us to Maldon, and get others there to carry us home."

An hour's walking took them to the ferry. It was now getting dusk, and they had come to the conclusion as they walked that it would be too late to attempt to get on that night beyond Burnham. The storm was as wild as ever, and although the passage was a narrow one it was as much as the ferryman could do to row the boat across.

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"How far is it from here to Burnham?"

"About four miles; but you won't get to Burnham to-night."

"How is that?" Geoffrey asked.

"You may get as far as the ferry, but you won't get taken over. There will be a big sea in the Crouch, for the wind is pretty nigh straight up it; but you will be able to sleep at the inn this side. In the morning, if the wind has gone down, you can cross; if not, you will have to go round by the bridge, nigh ten miles higher up."

This was unpleasant news. Not that it made any difference to them whether they slept on one side of the river or the other, but if the wind was too strong to admit of a passage in the morning, the necessity for making a detour would cost them many hours of valuable time. There was, however, no help for it, and they walked to Criksey Ferry. The little inn was crowded, for the ferry had been stopped all day, and many like themselves had been compelled to stop for a lull in the wind.

Scarcely had they entered when their names were joyously shouted out. "Ah, Masters Vickars, right glad am I to see you. We feared that surf had put an end to you. We asked at the ferry, but the man declared that no strange lads had crossed that day, and we were fearing we should have a sad tale to send to Hedingham by John Lirriper."

"We are truly glad to see you, Joe," Geoffrey said, as they warmly shook Joe Chambers and the two sailors by the hand.

"How did you get ashore?"

"On the mainmast, and pretty nigh drowned we were before we got there. I suppose the tide must have taken us a bit further up than it did you. We got here well nigh two hours ago, though we got a good meal and dried our clothes at a farmhouse."

"We got a meal, too, soon after we landed," Geoffrey said;

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"but we did not dry our clothes till we got to a little village. I did not ask its name. I am awfully sorry, Joe, about the *Susan*."

"It is a bad job, but it cannot be helped, Master Geoffrey. I owned a third of her, and two traders at Bricklesey own the other shares. Still I have no cause to grumble. I have laid by more than enough in the last four years to buy a share in another boat as good as she was. You see, a trader ain't like a smack. A trader's got only hull and sails, while a smack has got her nets beside, and they cost well nigh as much as the boat. Thankful enough we are that we have all escaped with our lives; and now I find you are safe my mind feels at rest over it."

"Do you think it will be calm enough to cross in the morning, Joe?"

"Like enough," the sailor replied; "a gale like this is like to blow itself out in twenty-four hours. It has been the worst I ever saw. It is not blowing now quite so hard as it did, and by the morning I reckon, though there may be a fresh wind, the gale will be over."

The number of travellers were far too great for the accommodation of the inn; and with the exception of two or three of the first arrivals all slept on some hay in one of the barns.

The next morning, although the wind was still strong, the fury of the gale had abated. The ferryman, however, said the water was so rough he must wait for a time before they crossed. But when Geoffrey offered him a reward to put their party on shore at once, he consented to do so, Joe Chambers and the two sailors assisting with the oars; and as the ferry-boat was large and strongly built, they crossed without further inconvenience than the wetting of their jackets.

Joe Chambers, who knew the town perfectly, at once took them to a place where they were able to hire a couple of horses,

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and on these rode to Maldon, some nine miles away. Here they procured other horses, and it was not long after midday when they arrived at Hedingham.

Mrs. Vickars held up her hands in astonishment at their shrunken garments; but her relief from the anxiety she had felt concerning what had befallen them during the gale was so great that she was unable to scold.

"We will tell you all about it, mother, afterwards," Geoffrey said, as he released himself from her embrace. "We have had a great adventure, and the *Susan* has been wrecked. But this is not the most important matter. Father, has the earl started yet?"

"He was to have gone this morning, Geoffrey, but the floods are likely to be out, and the roads will be in such a state that I have no doubt he has put off his journey."

"It is important that we should see him at once, father. We have overheard some people plotting against the queen's life, and measures must be taken at once for her safety. We will run up and change our things if you will go with us to see him. If you are there he will see you whatever he is doing, while if we go alone there might be delay."

Without waiting for an answer the boys ran upstairs and quickly returned in fresh clothes. Mr. Vickars was waiting for them with his hat on.

"You are quite sure of what you are saying, Geoffrey?" he observed as they walked towards the castle. "Remember, that if it should turn out an error, you are likely to come to sore disgrace instead of receiving commendation for your interference. Every one has been talking of plots against the queen for some time, and you may well have mistaken the purport of what you have heard."

"There is no mistake, father, it is a real conspiracy, though who are those concerned in it I know not. Lionel and I are

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not likely to raise a false alarm about nothing, as you will say yourself when you hear the story I have to tell the earl."

They had by this time entered the gates of the castle. "The earl has just finished dinner," one of the attendants replied in answer to the question of Mr. Vickars.

"Will you tell him that I wish to see him on urgent business?"

In two or three minutes the servant returned and asked the clergyman to follow him. The earl received him in his private chamber, for the castle was full with guests.

"Well, dominie, what is it?" he asked. "You want some help, I will be bound, for somebody ill or in distress. I know pretty well by this time the meaning of your urgent business."

"It is nothing of that kind to-day," the clergyman replied; "it is, in fact, my sons who wish to see your lordship. I do not myself know the full purport of their story, save that it is something which touches the safety of the queen."

The earl's expression at once changed.

"Is that so, young sirs? This is a serious matter, you know; it is a grave thing to bring an accusation against anyone in matters touching the state."

"I am aware that it is, my lord, and assuredly my brother and I would not lightly meddle with such matters; but I think that you will say this is a business that should be attended to. It happened thus, sir." He then briefly told how, that being out in a ketch that traded from Bricklesey, they were caught in the gale; that the vessel was driven on the sands, and they were cast ashore on a mast.

He then related the inhospitable reception they had met with. "It seemed strange to us, sir, and contrary to nature, that anyone should refuse to allow two shipwrecked lads to enter the house for shelter on such a day; and it seemed well-nigh impossible that his tale of the place being too full to hold us could be true. However, we started to walk. On our way

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we met four horsemen going towards the house, closely muffled up in cloaks."

"There was nothing very strange in that," the earl observed, 'in such weather as we had yesterday."

"Nothing at all, sir; we should not have given the matter one thought had it not been that the four men were very well mounted, and, apparently, gentlemen; and it was strange that such should have business in an out-of-the-way house in Foulness Island. A little further we met three men on foot. They were also wrapped up in cloaks; but they wore high riding-boots, and had probably left their horses on the other side of the ferry so as not to attract attention. A short time afterwards we met two more horsemen, one of whom asked us if he was going right for the house we had been at. As he was speaking a gust of wind blew off his hat. I fetched it and gave it to him, and as he stooped to put it on I saw that a tonsure was shaven on the top of his head. The matter had already seemed strange to us; but the fact that one of this number of men, all going to a lonely house, was a priest in disguise, seemed so suspicious that my brother and myself determined to try and get to the bottom of it."

Geoffrey then related how they had gone back to the house and effected an entrance into the loft extending over it; how he had through the cracks in the boards seen a party of men gathered in one of the lower rooms, and then repeated word for word the scraps of conversation that he had overheard.

The earl had listened with an expression of amused doubt to the early portion of the narrative; but when Geoffrey came to the part where accident had shown to him that one of these men proceeding towards this house was a disguised priest, his face became serious, and he listened with deep attention to the rest of the narrative.

"Faith," he said, "this is a serious matter, and you have

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done right well in following up your suspicions, and in risking your lives, for they would assuredly have killed you had they discovered you. Mr. Vickars, your sons must ride with me to London at once. The matter is too grave for a moment's delay. I must lay it before Burleigh at once. A day's delay might be fatal."

He rang a bell standing on the table. As soon as an attendant answered it he said, "Order three horses to be saddled at once; I must ride to London with these young gentlemen without delay. Order Parsons and Nichols to be ready in half an hour to set out with us. Have you had food, young sirs? for it seems you came hither directly you arrived." Finding that the boys had eaten nothing since they had left Maldon, he ordered food to be brought them, and begged them eat it while he explained to the countess and guests that sudden business that could not be delayed called him away to London. Half an hour later he started with the boys, the two servants following behind. Late that evening they arrived in London. It was too late to call on Lord Burleigh that night; but early the next morning the earl took the boys with him to the house of the great statesman. Leaving them in the ante-chamber he went in to the inner apartment, where the minister was at breakfast. Ten minutes later he came out, and called the boys in.

"The Earl of Oxford has told me your story," Lord Burleigh said. "Tell it me again, and omit nothing; for things that seem small are often of consequence in a matter like this."

Geoffrey again repeated his story, giving full details of all that had taken place from the time of their first reaching the house.

Lord Burleigh then questioned him closely as to whether they had seen any of the faces of the men, and would recognize them again.

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"I saw none from my spying-place above, my lord," Geoffrey said. "I could see only the tops of their heads, and most of them still kept their hats on; nor did we see them as they passed, with the exception only of the man I supposed to be a priest. His face I saw plainly. It was smooth shaven; his complexion was dark, his eyebrows were thin and straight, his face narrow. I should take him for a foreigner—either a Spaniard or Italian."

Lord Burleigh made a note of this description.

"Thanks, young sirs," he said. "I shall, of course, take measures to prevent this plot being carried out, and shall inform her majesty how bravely you both risked your lives to discover this conspiracy against her person. The Earl of Oxford informs me that you are pages of his cousin, Captain Francis Vere, a very brave and valiant gentleman; and that you bore your part bravely in the siege of Sluys, but are at present at home to rest after your labours there, and have permission of Captain Vere to take part in any trouble that may arise here owing to the action of the Spaniards. I have now no further occasion for your services, and you can return with the earl to Hedingham, but your attendance in London will be needed when we lay hands upon these conspirators."

The same day they rode back to Hedingham, but ten days later were again summoned to London. The queen had the day before journeyed to Windsor. Half an hour before she arrived at the wood near Datchet a strong party of her guard had suddenly surrounded it, and had found twelve armed men lurking there. These had been arrested and lodged in the Tower. Three of them were foreigners, the rest members of Catholic families known to be favourable to the Spanish cause. Their trial was conducted privately, as it was deemed advisable that as little should be made as possible of this and other similar plots against the queen's life that were discovered about this time.

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Geoffrey and Lionel gave their evidence before the council. As the only man they could have identified was not of the party captured, their evidence only went to show the motive of this gathering in the wood near Datchet. The prisoners stoutly maintained that Geoffrey had misunderstood the conversation he had partly overheard, and that their design was simply to make the queen a prisoner and force her to abdicate. Three of the prisoners, who had before been banished from the country and who had secretly returned, were sentenced to death; two of the others to imprisonment for a long term of years, the rest to banishment from England.

After the trial was over Lord Burleigh sent for the boys, and gave them a very gracious message in the queen's name, together with two rings in token of her majesty's gratitude. Highly delighted with these honours they returned to Hedingham, and devoted themselves even more assiduously than before to exercises in arms, in order that they might some day prove themselves valiant soldiers of the queen.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPANISH ARMADA.

THE struggle that was at hand between Spain and England had long been foreseen as inevitable. The one power was the champion of Roman Catholicism, the other of Protestantism; and yet, although so much hung upon the result of the encounter, and all Europe looked on with the most intense interest, both parties entered upon the struggle without allies, and this entirely from the personal fault of the sovereigns of the two nations.

Queen Elizabeth, by her constant intrigues, her underhand dealings with France and Spain, her grasping policy in the Netherlands, her meanness and parsimony, and the fact that she was ready at any moment to sacrifice the Netherlands to her own policy, had wholly alienated the people of the Low Country; for while their own efforts for defence were paralysed by the constant interference of Elizabeth, no benefit was obtained from the English army, whose orders were to stand always on the defensive—the queen's only anxiety appearing to be to keep her grasp upon the towns that had been handed over to her as the price of her alliance.

Her own counsellors were driven to their wits' end by her constant changes of purpose. Her troops were starving and in rags from her parsimony, the fleet lay dismantled and useless from want of funds, and except such arming and drilling as took

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place at the expense of the nobles, counties, and cities, no preparation whatever was made to meet the coming storm. Upon the other hand, Philip of Spain, who might have been at the head of a great Catholic league against England, had isolated himself by his personal ambitions. Had he declared himself ready, in the event of his conquest of England, to place James of Scotland upon the throne, he would have had Scotland with him, together with the Catholics of England, still a powerful and important body.

France, too, would have joined him, and the combination against Elizabeth and the Protestants of England would have been well-nigh irresistible. But this he could not bring himself to do. His dream was the annexation of England to Spain; and smarting as the English Catholics were under the execution of Mary of Scotland, their English spirit revolted against the idea of the rule of Spain, and the great Catholic nobles hastened, when the moment of danger arrived, to join in the defence of their country, while Scotland, seeing no advantage to be gained in the struggle, stood sullenly aloof, and France gave no aid to a project which was to result, if successful, in the aggrandizement of her already dangerously formidable neighbour.

Thus England and Spain stood alone—Philip slowly but steadily preparing for the great expedition for the conquest of England, Elizabeth hesitating, doubtful; at one moment gathering seamen and arming her fleet, a month or two later discharging the sailors and laying up the ships.

In the spring of 1587 Drake, with six vessels belonging to the crown and twenty-four equipped by merchants of London and other places, had seized a moment when Elizabeth's fickle mind had inclined to warlike measures, and knowing that the mood might last but a day, had slipped out of Plymouth and sailed for Spain a few hours before a messenger arrived with a

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peremptory order from Elizabeth against entering any Spanish port or offering violence to any Spanish town or ships. Although caught in a gale in the Channel, Drake held on, and, reaching Gibraltar on the 16th April, ascertained that Cadiz was crowded with transports and store-ships.

Vice-admiral Burroughs, controller of the navy, who had been specially appointed to thwart Drake's plans, opposed any action being taken; but Drake insisted upon attack, and on the 19th the fleet stood in to Cadiz harbour. Passing through the fire of the batteries, they sank the only great ship of war in the roads, drove off the Spanish galleys, and seized the vast fleet of store-ships loaded with wine, corn, and provisions of all sorts for the use of the Armada. Everything of value that could be conveniently moved was transferred to the English ships, then the Spanish vessels were set on fire, their cables cut, and they were left to drift an entangled mass of flame. Drake took a number of prisoners, and sent a messenger on shore proposing to exchange them for such English seamen as were prisoners in Spain. The reply was there were no English prisoners in Spain; and as this was notoriously untrue, it was agreed in the fleet that all the Spaniards they might take in the future should be sold to the Moors, and the money reserved for the redeeming of such Englishmen as might be in captivity there or elsewhere.

The English fleet then sailed for Cape St. Vincent, picking up on their way large convoys of store-ships all bound for the Tagus, where the Armada was collecting. These were all burned, and Drake brought up at Cape St. Vincent, hoping to meet there a portion of the Armada expected from the Mediterranean. As a harbour was necessary, he landed, stormed the fort at Faro, and took possession of the harbour there. The expected enemy did not appear, and Drake sailed up to the mouth of the Tagus, intending to go into Lisbon and attack the great Spanish fleet lying there under its admiral, Santa Cruz.

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That the force gathered there was enormous Drake well knew, but relying as much on the goodness of his cause as on the valour of his sailors, and upon the fact that the enemy would be too crowded together to fight with advantage, he would have carried out his plan had not a ship arrived from England with orders forbidding him to enter the Tagus. However, he lay for some time at the mouth of the river, destroying every ship that entered its mouth, and sending in a challenge to Santa Cruz to come out and fight. The Spanish admiral did not accept it, and Drake then sailed to Corunna, and there, as at Cadiz, destroyed all the ships collected in the harbour and then returned to England, having in the course of a few months inflicted an enormous amount of damage upon Spain, and having taken the first step to prove that England was the mistress of the sea.

But while the little band of English had been defending Sluys against the army of the Duke of Parma, Philip had been continuing his preparations, filling up the void made by the destruction wrought by Drake, and preparing an Armada which he might well have considered to be invincible. Elizabeth was still continuing her negotiations. She was quite ready to abandon the Netherlands to Spain if she could but keep the towns she held there, but she could not bring herself to hand these over either to the Netherlands or to Spain. She urged the States to make peace, to which they replied that they did not wish for peace on such terms as Spain would alone grant; they could defend themselves for ten years longer if left alone; they did not ask for further help, and only wanted their towns restored to them.

Had the Armada started as Philip intended in September, it would have found England entirely unprepared, for Elizabeth still obstinately refused to believe in danger, and the few ships that had been held in commission after Drake's return

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had been so long neglected that they could hardly keep the sea without repair; the rest lay unrigged in the Medway. But the delay gave England fresh time for preparation. Parma's army was lying in readiness for the invasion under canvas at Dunkirk, and their commander had received no information from Spain that the sailing of the Armada was delayed.

The cold, wet, and exposure told terribly upon them, and of the 30,000 who were ready to embark in September not 18,000 were fit for service at the commencement of the year. The expenses of this army and of the Armada were so great that Philip was at last driven to give orders to the Armada to start. But fortune again favoured England. Had the fleet sailed as ordered on the 30th of January they would again have found the Channel undefended, for Elizabeth, in one of her fits of economy, had again dismantled half the fleet that had been got ready for sea, and sent the sailors to their homes.

But the execution of Philip's orders was prevented by the sudden death of Santa Cruz. The Duke of Medina-Sidonia was appointed his successor, but as he knew nothing of the state of the Armada fresh delays became necessary, and the time was occupied by Elizabeth, not in preparing for the defence of the country, but in fresh negotiations for peace. She was ready to make any concessions to Spain, but Philip was now only amusing himself by deceiving her. Everything was now prepared for the expedition, and just as the fleet was ready to start, the negotiations were broken off. But though Elizabeth's government had made no preparations for the defence of the country, England herself had not been idle. Throughout the whole country men had been mustered, officered, and armed, and 100,000 were ready to move as soon as the danger became imminent.

The musters of the Midland counties, 30,000 strong, were to form a separate army, and were to march at once to a spot

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between Windsor and Harrow. The rest were to gather at the point of danger. The coast companies were to fall back wherever the enemy landed, burning the corn and driving off the cattle, and avoiding a battle until the force of the neighbouring counties joined them. Should the landing take place as was expected in Suffolk, Kent, or Sussex, it was calculated that between 30,000 and 40,000 men would bar the way to the invaders before they reached London, while 20,000 men of the western counties would remain to encounter the Duke of Guise, who had engaged to bring across an army of Frenchmen to aid the Spaniards.

Spain, although well aware of the strength of England on the sea, believed that she would have no difficulty with the raw English levies; but Parma, who had met the English at Sluys, had learnt to respect their fighting qualities, and in a letter to Philip gave the opinion that even if the Armada brought him a reinforcement of 6000 men he would still have an insufficient force for the conquest of England. He said, "When I shall have landed I must fight battle after battle. I shall lose men by wounds and disease, I must leave detachments behind me to keep open my communications, and in a short time the body of my army will become so weak that not only I may be unable to advance in the face of the enemy, and time may be given to the heretics and your majesty's other enemies to interfere, but there may fall out some notable inconvenience, with the loss of everything, and I be unable to remedy it."

Unfortunately, the English fleet was far less prepared than the land forces. The militia had been easily and cheaply extemporized, but a fleet can only be prepared by long and painful sacrifices. The entire English navy contained but thirteen ships of over four hundred tons, and including small cutters and pinnaces there were but thirty-eight vessels of all sorts and sizes carrying the queen's flag. Fortunately, Sir John

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Hawkins was at the head of the naval administration, and in spite of the parsimony of Elizabeth had kept the fleet in a good state of repair and equipment. The merchant navy, although numerous, was equally deficient in vessels of any size.

Philip had encouraged ship-building in Spain by grants from the crown, allowing four ducats a ton for every ship built of above three hundred tons burden, and six ducats a ton for every one above five hundred tons. Thus he had a large supply of great ships to draw upon in addition to those of the royal navy, while in England the largest vessels belonging to private owners did not exceed four hundred tons, and there were not more than two or three vessels of that size sailing from any port of the country. The total allowance by the queen for the repair of the whole of the royal navy, wages of shipwrights, clerks, carpenters, watchmen, cost of timber, and all other necessary dockyard expenses, was but £4000 a-year.

In December the fleet was ready for sea, together with the contingent furnished by the liberality and patriotism of the merchants and citizens of the great ports. But as soon as it was got together half the crews collected and engaged at so great an expense were dismissed, the merchant ships released, and England open to invasion, and had Parma started in the vessels he had prepared, Lord Howard, who commanded the English navy, could not have fired a shot to have prevented his crossing.

Well might Sir John Hawkins in his despair at Elizabeth's caprices exclaim: "We are wasting money, wasting strength, dishonouring and discrediting ourselves by our uncertain dallying." But though daily reports came from Spain of the readiness of the Armada to set sail, Elizabeth, even when she again permitted the navy to be manned, fettered it by allowing it to be provided with rations for only a month at a time, and

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permitting no reserves to be provided in the victualling stores; while the largest vessels were supplied with ammunition for only a day and a half's service, and the rest of the fleet with but enough for one day's service. The council could do nothing, and Lord Howard's letters prove that the queen, and she only, was responsible for the miserable state of things that prevailed.

At last, in May, Lord Howard sailed with the fleet down Channel, leaving Lord Henry Seymour with three men-of-war and a squadron of privateers to watch Dunkirk. At Plymouth the admiral found Drake with forty ships, all except one raised and sent to sea at the expense of himself and the gentry and merchants of the west counties. The weather was wild, as it had been all the winter. Howard with the great ships lay at anchor in the Sound, rolling heavily, while the smaller craft went for shelter into the mouth of the river. There were but eighteen days' provisions on board; fresh supplies promised did not arrive, and the crews were put on half rations, and eked these out by catching fish. At last, when the supplies were just exhausted, the victualling ships arrived with one month's fresh rations, and a message that no more would be sent. So villainous was the quality of the stores that fever broke out in the fleet.

It was not until the end of the month that Elizabeth would even permit any further preparations to be made, and the supplies took some time collecting. The crews would have been starved had not the officers so divided the rations as to make them last six weeks. The men died in scores from dysentery brought on by the sour and poisonous beer issued to them, and Howard and Drake ordered wine and arrow-root from the town for the use of the sick, and had to pay for it from their own pockets.

But at last the Armada was ready for starting. Contingents

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of Spanish, Italians, and Portuguese were gathered together with the faithful from all countries—Jesuits from France; exiled priests, Irish and English; and many Catholic Scotch, English, and Irish noblemen and gentlemen. The six squadrons into which the fleet was divided contained sixty-five large war ships, the smallest of which was seven hundred tons. Seven were over one thousand, and the largest, an Italian ship, *La Regazona*, was thirteen hundred. All were built high like castles, their upper works musket-proof, their main timbers four or five feet thick, and of a strength it was supposed no English cannon could pierce.

Next to the big ships, or galleons as they were called, were four galleasses, each carrying fifty guns and 450 soldiers and sailors, and rowed by 300 slaves. Besides these were four galleys, fifty-six great armed merchant ships, the finest Spain possessed, and twenty caravels or small vessels. Thus the fighting fleet amounted to 129 vessels, carrying in all 2430 cannon. On board was stored an enormous quantity of provisions for the use of the army after it landed in England, there being sufficient to feed 40,000 men for six months.

There were on board 8000 sailors, 19,000 soldiers, 1000 gentlemen volunteers, 600 priests, servants, and miscellaneous officers, and 2000 galley slaves. This was indeed a tremendous array to meet the fleet lying off Plymouth, consisting of 29 queen's ships of all sizes, 10 small vessels belonging to Lord Howard and members of his family, and 43 privateers between 40 and 400 tons under Drake, the united crews amounting to something over 9000 men.

The winter had passed pleasantly to Geoffrey and Lionel Vickars; the earl had taken a great fancy to them, and they had stayed for some time in London as members of his suite. When the spring came they had spoken about rejoining Francis Vere in Holland, but the earl had said that there was little

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doing there. The enmity excited by the conduct of Elizabeth prevented any co-operation between the Dutch and English; and indeed the English force was reduced to such straits by the refusal of the queen to furnish money for their pay, or to provide funds for even absolute necessaries, that it was wholly incapable of taking the field, and large numbers of the men returned to England.

Had this treatment of her soldiers and sailors at the time when such peril threatened their country been occasioned by want of funds, some excuse would have been possible for the conduct of Elizabeth; but at the time there were large sums lying in the treasury, and it was parsimony and not incapacity to pay that actuated Elizabeth in the course she pursued.

As the boys were still uneasy as to the opinion Francis Vere might form of their continued stay in England, they wrote to him, their letter being inclosed in one from the earl; but the reply set their minds at rest—"By all means stay in England," Captain Vere wrote, "since there is nothing doing here of any note or consequence, nor likely to be. We are simply idling out time in Bergen-op-Zoom, and not one of us but is longing to be at home to bear his part in the events pending there. It is hard, indeed, to be confined in this miserable Dutch town while England is in danger. Unfortunately we are soldiers and must obey orders; but as you are as yet only volunteers, free to act as you choose, it would be foolish in the extreme for you to come over to this dull place while there is so much going on in England. I have written to my cousin, asking him to introduce you to some of the country gentlemen who have fitted out a ship for service against the Spaniards, so that you may have a hand in what is going on."

This the earl had done, and early in May they had journeyed down to Plymouth on horseback with a party of other gentle-

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men who were going on board the *Active*, a vessel of two hundred and fifty tons belonging to a gentleman of Devonshire, one Master Audrey Drake, a relation of Sir Francis Drake. The earl himself was with the party. He did not intend to go on board, for he was a bad sailor; and though ready, as he said, to do his share of fighting upon land, would be only an encumbrance on board a ship.

He went down principally at the request of Cecil and other members of the council, who, knowing that he was a favourite of the queen, thought that his representations as to the state of the fleet might do more than they could do to influence her to send supplies to the distressed sailors. The earl visited the ships lying in the mouth of the Tamar, and three times started in a boat to go out to those in the Sound; but the sea was so rough, and he was so completely prostrated by sickness, that he had each time to put back. What he saw, however, on board the ships he visited, and heard from Lord Howard as to the state of those at sea, was quite sufficient. He at once expended a considerable amount of money in buying wine and fresh meat for the sick, and then hurried away to London to lay before the queen the result of his personal observations, and to implore her to order provisions to be immediately despatched to the fleet.

But even the description given by one of her favourites of the sufferings of the seamen was insufficient to induce the queen to open her purse-strings, and the earl left her in great dudgeon; and although his private finances had been much straitened by his extravagance and love of display, he at once chartered a ship, filled her with provisions, and despatched her to Plymouth.

Mr. Drake and the gentlemen with him took up their abode in the town until there should be need for them to go on board the *Active*, where the accommodation was much cramped, and

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life by no means agreeable; and the Vickars therefore escaped sharing the sufferings of those on board ship.

At the end of May came the news that the Armada had sailed on the 19th, and high hopes were entertained that the period of waiting had terminated. A storm, however, scattered the great fleet, and it was not until the 12th of July that they sailed from the Bay of Ferrol, where they had collected after the storm.

Never was there known a season so boisterous as the summer of 1588, and when off Ushant, in a south-west gale, four galleys were wrecked on the French coast, and the *Santa Anna*, a galleon of 800 tons, went down, carrying with her ninety seamen, three hundred soldiers, and 50,000 ducats in gold.

After two days the storm abated, and the fleet again proceeded. At daybreak on the 20th the Lizard was in sight, and an English fishing-boat was seen running along their line. Chase was given, but she soon out-sailed her pursuers, and carried the news to Plymouth. The Armada had already been made out from the coast the night before, and beacon lights had flashed the news all over England. In every village and town men were arming and saddling and marching away to the rendezvous of the various corps.

In Plymouth the news was received with the greatest rejoicing. Thanks to the care with which the provisions had been husbanded, and to the manner in which the officers and volunteers had from their private means supplemented the scanty stores, there was still a week's provisions on board, and this, it was hoped, would suffice for their needs. The scanty supply of ammunition was a greater source of anxiety; but they hoped that fresh supplies would be forthcoming, now that even the queen could no longer close her eyes to the urgent necessity of the case.

As soon as the news arrived all the gentlemen in the town

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flocked on board the ships, and on the night of the 19th the queen's ships and some of the privateers went to moorings behind Ram Head, so that they could make clear to sea; and on the morning when the Spaniards sighted the Lizard, forty sail were lying ready for action under the headland.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the look-out men on the hill reported a line of sails on the western horizon. Two wings were at first visible, which were gradually united as the top-sails of those in the centre rose above the line of sea. As they arose it could be seen that the great fleet was sailing, in the form of a huge crescent, before a gentle wind. A hundred and fifty ships, large and small, were counted, as a few store-ships bound for Flanders had joined the Armada for protection.

The *Active* was one of the privateers that had late the evening before gone out to Ram Head, and just as it was growing dusk the anchors were got up, and the little fleet sailed out from the shelter of the land as the Armada swept along.

The Spanish admiral at once ordered the fleet to lie-to for the night, and to prepare for a general action at daybreak, as he knew from a fisherman he had captured that the English fleet were at Plymouth. The wind was on shore, but all through the night Howard's and Drake's ships beat out from the Sound until they took their places behind the Spanish fleet, whose position they could perfectly make out by the light of the half-moon that rose at two in the morning.

On board the English fleet all was confidence and hilarity. The sufferings of the last three months were forgotten. The numbers and magnitude of the Spanish ships counted as nothing. The sailors of the west country had met the Spaniards on the Indian seas and proved their masters, and doubted not for a moment that they should do so again.

There was scarce a breath of air when day broke, but at eight o'clock a breeze sprang up from the west, and the

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Armada made sail and attempted to close with the English; but the low, sharp English ships sailed two feet to the one of the floating castles of Spain, and could sail close to the wind, while the Spanish ships, if they attempted to close-haul their sails, drifted bodily to leeward. Howard's flagship, the *Ark-Raleigh*, with three other English ships, opened the engagement by running down along their rear-line, firing into each galleon as they passed, then wearing round and repeating the manœuvre. The great *San Matteo* luffed out from the rest of the fleet and challenged them to board, but they simply poured their second broadside into her and passed on.

The excellence of the manœuvring of the English ships, and the rapidity and accuracy of their fire, astonished the Spaniards. Throughout the whole forenoon the action continued; the Spaniards making efforts to close, but in vain, the English ships keeping the weather-gage and sailing continually backwards and forwards, pouring in their broadsides. The height and size of the Spanish ships were against them; and being to leeward they heeled over directly they came up to the wind to fire a broadside, and their shots for the most part went far over their assailants, while they themselves suffered severely from the English fire. Miquel de Oquendo, who commanded one of the six Spanish squadrons, distinguished himself by his attempts to close with the English, and by maintaining his position in the rear of the fleet engaged in constant conflict with them.

He was a young nobleman of great promise, distinguished alike for his bravery and chivalrous disposition; but he could do little while the wind remained in the west and the English held the weather-gage. So far only the ships that had been anchored out under Ram Head had taken part in the fight, those lying higher up in the Sound being unable to make their way out. At noon the exertions of their crews, who had from the preceding evening worked incessantly, prevailed, and they

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were now seen coming out from behind the headland to take part in the struggle. Medina-Sidonia signalled to his fleet to make sail up Channel, Martinez de Ricaldo covering the rear with the squadron of Biscay. He was vice-admiral of the fleet, and considered to be the best seaman Spain possessed now that Santa Cruz was dead.

The wind was now rising. Lord Howard sent off a fast boat with letters to Lord Henry Seymour, telling him how things had gone so far, and bidding him be prepared for the arrival of the Spanish fleet in the Downs. As the afternoon went on the wind rose, and a rolling sea came in from the west. Howard still hung upon the Spanish rear, firing but seldom in order to save his powder. As evening fell, the Spanish vessels, huddled closely together, frequently came into collision with one another, and in one of these the *Capitana*, the flagship of the Andalusian division, commanded by Admiral Pedro de Valdez, had her bowsprit carried away, the foremast fell overboard, and the ship dropped out of her place.

Two of the galleasses came to her assistance and tried to take her in tow, but the waves were running so high that the cable broke. Pedro de Valdez had been commander of the Spanish fleet on the coast of Holland, and knew the English Channel and the northern shores of France and Holland well. The duke therefore despatched boats to bring him off with his crew, but he refused to leave his charge. Howard, as with his ships he passed her, believed her to be deserted and went on after the fleet; but a London vessel kept close to her and exchanged shots with her all night, until Drake, who had turned aside to chase what he believed to be a portion of the Spanish fleet that had separated itself from the rest, but which turned out to be the merchant ships that had joined it for protection, came up, and the *Capitana* struck her flag. Drake took her into Torbay, and there left her in the care of the Brixham

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fishermen, and taking with him Valdez and the other officers sailed away to join Lord Howard. The fishermen, on searching the ship, found some tons of gunpowder on board her. Knowing the scarcity of ammunition in the fleet they placed this on board the *Roebuck*, the fastest trawler in the harbour, and she started at once in pursuit of the fleet.

The misfortune to the *Capitana* was not the only one that befell the Spaniards. While Oquendo was absent from his galleon a quarrel arose among the officers, who were furious at the ill result of the day's fighting. The captain struck the master-gunner with a stick; the latter, a German, rushed below in a rage, thrust a burning fuse into a powder barrel, and sprang through a port-hole into the sea. The whole of the deck was blown up, with two hundred sailors and soldiers; but the ship was so strongly built that she survived the shock, and her mast still stood.

The duke sent boats to learn what had happened. These carried off the few who remained unhurt, but there was no means of taking off the wounded. These, however, were treated kindly and sent on shore when the ship was picked up at daylight by the English, who, on rifling her, found to their delight that there were still many powder barrels on board that had escaped the explosion.

The morning broke calm, and the wind, when it came, was from the east, which gave the Spaniards the advantage of position. The two fleets lay idle all day three or four miles apart, and the next morning, as the wind was still from the east, the Spaniards bore down upon Howard to offer battle.

The English, however, headed out to sea. Encouraged by seeing their assailants avoid a pitched battle the Spaniards gave chase. The *San Marcos*, the fastest sailer in the fleet, left the rest behind, and when the breeze headed round at noon she was several miles to windward of her consorts, and the English

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at once set upon her. She fought with extreme courage, and defended herself single-handed for an hour and a half, when Oquendo came up to the rescue, and as the action off Plymouth had almost exhausted his stock of powder, and the Brixham sloop had not yet come up, Howard was obliged to draw off.

The action of this day was fought off Portland. During the three days the British fleet had been to sea they had received almost hourly reinforcements. From every harbour and fishing port along the coast from Plymouth to the Isle of Wight vessels of all sizes, smacks, and boats put off, crowded with noblemen and gentlemen anxious to take part in the action, and their enthusiasm added to that of the weary and ill-fed sailors. At the end of the third day the English fleet had increased to a hundred sail, many of which, however, were of very small burden.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE ROUT OF THE ARMADA.

THE fight between the fleets had begun on Sunday morning, and at the end of the third day the strength of the Armada remained unbroken. The moral effect had no doubt been great, but the loss of two or three ships was a trifle to so large a force, and the spirit of the Spaniards had been raised by the gallant and successful defence the *San Marcos* had made on the Tuesday afternoon. Wednesday was again calm. The magazines of the English ships were empty. Though express after express had been sent off praying that ammunition might be sent, none had arrived, and the two fleets lay six miles apart without action, save that the galleasses came out and skirmished for a while with the English ships.

That evening, however, a supply of ammunition sufficient for another day's fighting arrived, and soon after daybreak the English fleet moved down towards the Armada, and for the first time engaged them at close quarters. The *Ark-Raleigh*, the *Bear*, the *Elizabeth Jones*, the *Lion*, and the *Victory* bore on straight into the centre of the Spanish galleons, exchanging broadsides with each as they passed. Oquendo with his vessel was right in the course of the English flagship, and a collision took place, in which the *Ark-Raleigh's* rudder was unshipped, and she became unmanageable.

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The enemy's vessels closed round her, but she lowered her boats, and these, in spite of the fire of the enemy, brought her head round before the wind, and she made her way through her antagonists and got clear. For several hours the battle continued. The Spanish fire was so slow, and their ships so unwieldy, that it was rarely they succeeded in firing a shot into their active foes, while the English shot tore their way through the massive timbers of the Spanish vessels, scattering the splinters thickly among the soldiers, who had been sent below to be out of harm's way; but beyond this, and inflicting much damage upon masts and spars, the day's fighting had no actual results. No captures were made by the English.

The Spaniards suffered, but made no sign; nevertheless their confidence in their powers was shaken. Their ammunition was also running short, and they had no hope of refilling their magazines until they effected a junction with Parma. Their admiral that night wrote to him asking that two shiploads of shot and powder might be sent to him immediately. "The enemy pursue me," he said; "they fire upon me most days from morning till nightfall, but they will not close and grapple. I have given them every opportunity. I have purposely left ships exposed to tempt them to board, but they decline to do it; and there is no remedy, for they are swift and we are slow. They have men and ammunition in abundance." The Spanish admiral was unaware that the English magazines were even more empty than his own.

On Friday morning Howard sailed for Dover to take in the supplies that were so sorely needed. The Earl of Sussex, who was in command of the castle, gave him all that he had, and the stores taken from the prizes came up in light vessels and were divided among the fleet, and in the evening the English fleet again sailed out and took up its place in the rear of the Armada.

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On Saturday morning the weather changed. After six days of calm and sunshine it began to blow hard from the west, with driving showers. The Spaniards, having no pilots who knew the coasts, anchored off Calais. The English fleet, closely watching their movements, brought up two miles astern.

The Spanish admiral sent off another urgent letter to Parma at Dunkirk, begging him to send immediately thirty or forty fast gunboats to keep the English at bay. Parma had received the admiral's letters, and was perfectly ready to embark his troops, but could not do this as the admiral expected he would, until the fleet came up to protect him. The lighters and barges he had constructed for the passage were only fit to keep the sea in calm weather, and would have been wholly at the mercy of even a single English ship of war. He could not, therefore, embark his troops until the duke arrived. As to the gunboats asked for, he had none with him.

But while the Spanish admiral had grave cause for uneasiness in the situation in which he found himself, Lord Howard had no greater reason for satisfaction. In spite of his efforts the enemy's fleet had arrived at their destination with their strength still unimpaired, and were in communication with the Duke of Parma's army. Lord Seymour had come up with a squadron from the mouth of the Thames, but his ships had but one day's provisions on board, while Drake and Howard's divisions had all but exhausted their supplies. The previous day's fighting had used up the ammunition obtained at Dover. Starvation would drive every English ship from the sea in another week at latest. The Channel would then be open for the passage of Parma's army.

At five o'clock on Sunday evening a council of war was held in Lord Howard's cabin, and it was determined, that as it was impossible to attack the Spanish fleet where they lay at the edge of shallow water, an attempt must be made to

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drive them out into the Channel with fire-ships. Eight of the private vessels were accordingly taken, and such combustibles as could be found—pitch, tar, old sails, empty casks, and other materials—were piled into them. At midnight the tide set directly from the English fleet towards the Spaniards, and the fire-ships, manned by their respective crews, hoisted sail and drove down towards them.

When near the Armada the crews set fire to the combustibles, and taking to their boats rowed back to the fleet. At the sight of the flames bursting up from the eight ships bearing down upon them, the Spaniards were seized with a panic. The admiral fired a gun as a signal, and all cut their cables and hoisted sail, and succeeded in getting out to sea before the fire-ships arrived. They lay-to six miles from shore, intending to return in the morning and recover their anchors; but Drake with his division of the fleet, and Seymour with the squadron from the Thames, weighed their anchors and stood off after them, while Howard with his division remained off Calais, where, in the morning, the largest of the four galleasses was seen aground on Calais Bar. Lord Howard wasted many precious hours in capturing her before he set off to join Drake and Seymour, who were thundering against the Spanish fleet. The wind had got up during the night, and the Spaniards had drifted farther than they expected, and when morning dawned were scattered over the sea off Gravelines. Signals were made for them to collect, but before they could do so Drake and Seymour came up and opened fire within pistol-shot. The English admiral saw at once that, with the wind rising from the south, if he could drive the unwieldy galleons north they would be cut off from Dunkirk, and would not be able to beat back again until there was a change of wind.

All through the morning the English ships poured a continuous shower of shot into the Spanish vessels, which, huddled

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together in a confused mass, were unable to make any return whatever. The duke and Oquendo, with some of the best sailors among the fleet, tried to bear out from the crowd and get room to manœuvre, but Drake's ships were too weatherly and too well handled to permit of this, and they were driven back again into the confused mass, which was being slowly forced towards the shoals and banks of the coasts.

Howard came up at noon with his division, and until sunset the fire was maintained, by which time almost the last cartridge was spent, and the crews worn out by their incessant labour. They took no prizes, for they never attempted to board. They saw three great galleons go down, and three more drift away towards the sands of Ostend, where they were captured either by the English garrisoned there or by three vessels sent by Lord Willoughby from Flushing, under the command of Francis Vere. Had the English ammunition lasted but a few more hours the whole of the Armada would have been either driven ashore or sunk; but when the last cartridge had been burned the assailants drew off to take on board the stores which had, while the fighting was going on, been brought up by some provision ships from the Thames.

But the Spaniards were in no condition to benefit by the cessation of the attack. In spite of the terrible disadvantages under which they laboured, they had fought with splendid courage. The sides of the galleons had been riddled with shot, and the splinters caused by the rending of the massive timbers had done even greater execution than the iron hail. Being always to leeward, and heeling over with the wind, the ships had been struck again and again below the water-line, and many were only kept from sinking by nailing sheets of lead over the shot-holes.

Their guns were, for the most part, dismounted or knocked to pieces. Several had lost masts, the carnage among the

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crews was frightful, and yet not a single ship hauled down her colours. The *San Matteo*, which was one of those that grounded between Ostend and Sluys, fought to the last, and kept Francis Vere's three ships at bay for two hours, until she was at last carried by boarding.

Left to themselves at the end of the day, the Spaniards gathered in what order they could, and made sail for the north. On counting the losses they found that four thousand men had been killed or drowned, and the number of wounded must have been far greater. The crews were utterly worn-out and exhausted. They had the day before been kept at work cleaning and refitting, and the fire-ships had disturbed them early in the night. During the engagement there had been no time to serve out food, and the labours of the long struggle had completely exhausted them. Worst of all, they were utterly disheartened by the day's fighting. They had been pounded by their active foes, who fired five shots to their one, and whose vessels sailed round and round them, while they themselves had inflicted no damage that they could perceive upon their assailants.

The English admirals had no idea of the extent of the victory they had won. Howard, who had only come up in the middle of the fight, believed that they "were still wonderful great and strong," while even Drake, who saw more clearly how much they had suffered, only ventured to hope that some days at least would elapse before they could join hands with Parma. In spite of the small store of ammunition that had arrived the night before, the English magazines were almost empty; but they determined to show a good front, and "give chase as though they wanted nothing."

When the morning dawned the English fleet were still to windward of the Armada, while to leeward were lines of white foam, where the sea was breaking on the shoals of Holland. It seemed that the Armada was lost. At this critical

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moment the wind suddenly shifted to the east. This threw the English fleet to leeward, and enabled the Spaniards to head out from the coast and make for the North Sea. The Spanish admiral held a council. The sea had gone down, and they had now a fair wind for Calais; and the question was put to the sailing-masters and captains whether they should return into the Channel or sail north round Scotland and Ireland, and so return to Spain. The former was the courageous course, but the spirit of the Spaniards was broken, and the vote was in favour of what appeared a way of escape. Therefore, the shattered fleet bore on its way north. On board the English fleet a similar council was being held, and it was determined that Lord Seymour's squadron should return to guard the Channel, lest Parma should take advantage of the absence of the fleet to cross from Dunkirk to England, and that Howard and Drake with their ninety ships should pursue the Spaniards; for it was not for a moment supposed that the latter had entirely abandoned their enterprise, and intended to return to Spain without making another effort to rejoin Parma.

During the week's fighting Geoffrey and Lionel Vickars had taken such part as they could in the contest; but as there had been no hand-to-hand fighting, the position of the volunteers on board the fleet had been little more than that of spectators. The crews worked the guns and manœuvred the sails, and the most the lads could do was to relieve the ship-boys in carrying up powder and shot, and to take round drink to men serving the guns. When not otherwise engaged they had watched with intense excitement the manœuvres of their own ship and of those near them, as they swept down towards the great hulls, delivered their broadsides, and then shot off again before the Spaniards had had time to discharge more than a gun or two. The sails had been pierced in several places, but not a single

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GEOFFREY CARRIED OVERBOARD BY THE FALLING MAST.

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shot had struck the hull of the vessel. In the last day's fighting, however, the *Active* became entangled among several of the Spanish galleons, and being almost becalmed by their lofty hulls, one of them ran full at her, and rolling heavily in the sea, seemed as if she would overwhelm her puny antagonist.

Geoffrey was standing at the end of the poop when the mizzen rigging became entangled in the stern gallery of the Spaniard, and a moment later the mast snapped off, and as it fell carried him overboard. For a moment he was half-stunned, but caught hold of a piece of timber shot away from one of the enemy's ships, and clung to it mechanically. When he recovered and looked round, the *Active* had drawn out from between the Spaniards, and the great galleon which had so nearly sunk her was close beside him.

The sea was in a turmoil; the waves as they set in from the west being broken up by the rolling of the great ships, and torn by the hail of shot. The noise was prodigious, from the incessant cannonade kept up by the English ships and the return of the artillery on board the Armada, the rending of timber, the heavy crashes as the great galleons rolled against one another, the shouting on board the Spanish ships, the creaking of the masts and yards, and the flapping of the sails.

On trying to strike out, Geoffrey found that as he had been knocked overboard he had struck his right knee severely against the rail of the vessel, and was at present unable to use that leg. Fearful of being run down by one of the great ships, and still more of being caught between two of them as they rolled, he looked round to try to get sight of an English ship in the throng. Then, seeing that he was entirely surrounded by Spaniards, he left the spar and swam as well as he could to the bow of a great ship close beside him, and grasping a rope trailing from the bowsprit, managed by its aid to climb up until he reached the bobstay, across which he seated him-

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self with his back to the stem. The position was a precarious one, and after a time he gained the wooden carved work above, and obtained a seat there just below the bowsprit, and hidden from the sight of those on deck a few feet above him. As he knew the vessels were drifting to leeward towards the shoals, he hoped to remain hidden until the vessel struck, and then to gain the shore.

Presently the shifting of the positions of the ships brought the vessel on which he was into the outside line. The shots now flew thickly about, and he could from time to time feel a jar as the vessel was struck.

So an hour went on. At the end of that time he heard a great shouting on deck, and the sound of men running to and fro. Happening to look down he saw that the sea was but a few feet below him, and knew that the great galleon was sinking. Another quarter of an hour she was so much lower that he was sure she could not swim many minutes longer; and to avoid being drawn down with her he dropped into the water and swam off. He was but a short distance away when he heard a loud cry, and glancing over his shoulder saw the ship disappearing. He swam desperately, but was caught in the suck and carried under; but there was no great depth of water, and he soon came to the surface again. The sea was dotted with struggling men and pieces of wreckage. He swam to one of the latter, and held on until he saw some boats, which the next Spanish ship had lowered when she saw her consort disappearing, rowing towards them, and was soon afterwards hauled into one of them. He had closed his eyes as it came up, and assumed the appearance of insensibility, and he lay in the bottom of the boat immovable, until after a time he heard voices above, and then felt himself being carried up the ladder and laid down on the deck.

He remained quiet for some time, thinking over what he

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had best do. He was certain that were it known he was English he would at once be stabbed and thrown overboard, for there was no hope of quarter; but he was for some time unable to devise any plan by which, even for a short time, to conceal his nationality. He only knew a few words of Spanish, and would be detected the moment he opened his lips. He thought of leaping up suddenly and jumping overboard; but his chance of reaching the English ships to windward would be slight indeed. At last an idea struck him, and sitting up he opened his eyes and looked round. Several other Spaniards who had been picked up lay exhausted on the deck near him. A party of soldiers and sailors close by were working a cannon. The bulwarks were shot away in many places, dead and dying men lay scattered about, the decks were everywhere stained with blood, and no one paid any attention to him until presently the fire began to slacken. Shortly afterwards a Spanish officer came up and spoke to him.

Geoffrey rose to his feet, rubbed his eyes, yawned, and burst into an idiotic laugh. The officer spoke again but he paid no attention, and the Spaniard turned away, believing that the lad had lost his senses from fear and the horrors of the day.

As night came on he was several times addressed, but always with the same result. When after dark food and wine were served out, he seized the portion offered to him, and hurrying away crouched under the shelter of a gun, and devoured it as if fearing it would be taken from him again.

When he saw that the sailors were beginning to repair some of the most necessary ropes and stays that had been shot away, he pushed his way through them and took his share of the work, laughing idiotically from time to time. He had, when he saw that the galleon was sinking, taken off his doublet, the better to be able to swim, and in his shirt and trunks there was nothing to distinguish him from a Spaniard, and none sus-

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pected that he was other than he seemed to be—a ship's boy, who had lost his senses from fear. When the work was done, he threw himself on the deck with the weary sailors. His hopes were that the battle would be renewed in the morning, and that either the ship might be captured, or that an English vessel might pass so close alongside that he might leap over and swim to her.

Great was his disappointment next day when the sudden change of wind gave the Spanish fleet the weather-gage, and enabled them to steer away for the north. He joined in the work of the crew, paying no attention whatever to what was passing around him, or heeding in the slightest the remarks made to him. Once or twice when an officer spoke to him sternly he gave a little cry, ran to the side, and crouched down as if in abject fear. In a very short time no attention was paid to him, and he was suffered to go about as he chose, being regarded as a harmless imbecile. He was in hopes that the next day the Spaniards would change their course and endeavour to beat back to the Channel, and was at once disappointed and surprised as they sped on before the south-westerly wind, which was hourly increasing in force. Some miles behind he could see the English squadron in pursuit; but these made no attempt to close up, being well contented to see the Armada sailing away, and being too straitened in ammunition to wish to bring on an engagement so long as the Spaniards were following their present course.

The wind blew with ever-increasing force; the lightly ballasted ships made bad weather, rolling deep in the seas, straining heavily, and leaking badly through the opening seams and the hastily-stopped shot-holes. Water was extremely scarce, and at a signal from the admiral all the horses and mules were thrown overboard in order to husband the supply. Several of the masts, badly injured by the English shot, went by the

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board, and the vessels dropped behind crippled, to be picked up by the pursuing fleet.

Lord Howard followed as far as the mouth of the Forth; and seeing that the Spaniards made no effort to enter the estuary, and his provisions being now well-nigh exhausted, he hove the fleet about and made back for the Channel, leaving two small vessels only to follow the Armada and watch its course, believing that it would make for Denmark, refit there, and then return to rejoin Parma.

It was a grievous disappointment to the English to be thus forced by want of provisions to relinquish the pursuit. Had they been properly supplied with provisions and ammunition they could have made an end of the Armada; whereas, they believed that by allowing them now to escape the whole work would have to be done over again. They had sore trouble to get back again off the Norfolk coast. The wind became so furious that the fleet was scattered. A few of the largest ships reached Margate; others were driven into Harwich, others with difficulty kept the sea until the storm broke.

It might have been thought that after such service as the fleet had rendered even Elizabeth might have been generous; but now that the danger was over, she became more niggardly than ever. No fresh provisions were supplied for the sick men, and though in the fight off the Dutch coast only some fifty or sixty had been killed, in the course of a very short time the crews were so weakened by deaths and disease that scarce a ship could have put to sea, however urgent the necessity. Drake and Howard spent every penny they could raise in buying fresh meat and vegetables, and in procuring some sort of shelter on shore for the sick. Had the men received the wages due to them they could have made a shift to have purchased what they so urgently required; but though the Treasury was full of money, not a penny was forthcoming until every item of the accounts

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had been investigated and squabbled over. Howard was compelled to pay from his private purse for everything that had been purchased at Plymouth, Sir John Hawkins was absolutely ruined by the demands made on him to pay for necessaries supplied to the fleet, and had the admirals and sailors of the fleet that saved England behaved like ignominious cowards, their treatment could not have been worse than that which they received at the hands of their sovereign.

But while the English seamen were dying like sheep from disease and neglect, their conquered foes were faring no better. They had breathed freely for the first time when they saw the English fleet bear up; an examination was made of the provisions that were left, and the crews were placed on rations of eight ounces of bread, half a pint of wine, and a pint of water a day. The fleet was still a great one, for of the hundred and fifty ships which had sailed from Corunna, a hundred and twenty still held together. The weather now turned bitterly cold, with fog and mist, squalls and driving showers; and the vessels, when they reached the north coast of Scotland, lost sight of each other, and each struggled for herself in the tempestuous sea.

A week later the weather cleared, and on the 9th of August Geoffrey looking round at daybreak saw fifteen other ships in sight. Among these were the galleons of Calderon and Ricaldo, the *Rita*, *San Marcos*, and eleven other vessels. Signals were flying from all of them, but the sea was so high that it was scarce possible to lower a boat. That night it again blew hard and the fog closed in, and in the morning Geoffrey found that the ship he was on, and all the others, with the exception of that of Calderon, were steering north; the intention of Ricaldo and De Leyva being to make for the Orkneys and refit there. Calderon had stood south, and had come upon Sidonia with fifty ships; and these, bearing well

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away to the west of Ireland, finally succeeded for the most part in reaching Spain, their crews reduced by sickness and want to a mere shadow of their original strength.

The cold became bitter as De Leyva's ships made their way towards the Orkneys. The storm was furious, and the sailors, unaccustomed to the cold and weakened by disease and famine, could no longer work their ships, and De Leyva was obliged at last to abandon his intention and make south. One galleon was driven on the Faroe Islands, a second on the Orkneys, and a third on the Isle of Mull, where it was attacked by the natives and burned with almost every one on board. The rest managed to make the west coast of Ireland, and the hope that they would find shelter in Galway Bay, or the mouth of the Shannon, began to spring up in the breasts of the exhausted crews.

The Irish were their co-religionists and allies, and had only been waiting for news of the success of the Armada to rise in arms against the English, who had but few troops there. Rumours of disaster had arrived, and a small frigate had been driven into Tralee Bay. The fears of the garrison at Tralee Castle overcame their feelings of humanity, and all on board were put to death. Two galleons put into Dingle, and landing begged for water; but the natives, deciding that the Spanish cause was a lost one, refused to give them a drop, seized the men who had landed in the boats, and the galleons had to put to sea again.

Another ship of a thousand tons, *Our Lady of the Rosary*, was driven into the furious straits between the Blasket Islands and the coast of Kerry. Of her crew of seven hundred, five hundred had died. Before she got half-way through she struck among the breakers, and all the survivors perished save the son of the pilot, who was washed ashore lashed to a plank. Six others who had reached the mouth of the Shannon sent their boats ashore for water; but although there were no English there the Irish feared to supply them, even though the

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Spaniards offered any sum of money for a few casks. One of the ships was abandoned and the others put to sea, only to be dashed ashore in the same gale that wrecked *Our Lady of the Rosary*, and of all their crews only one hundred and fifty men were cast ashore alive. Along the coast of Connemara, Mayo, and Sligo many other ships were wrecked. In almost every case the crews who reached the shore were at once murdered by the native savages for the sake of their clothes and jewellery.

Geoffrey had suffered as much as the rest of the crew on board the galleon in which he sailed. All were so absorbed by their own suffering and misery that none paid any attention to the idiot boy in their midst. He worked at such work as there was to do: assisted to haul on the ropes, to throw the dead overboard, and to do what could be done for the sick and wounded. Like all on board he was reduced almost to a skeleton, and was scarce able to stand.

As the surviving ships passed Galway Bay, one of them, which was leaking so badly that she could only have been kept afloat a few hours in any case, entered it, and brought up opposite the town. Don Lewis of Cordova, who commanded, sent a party on shore, believing that in Galway, between which town and Spain there had always been close connections, they would be well received. They were, however, at once taken prisoners. An attempt was made to get up the anchors again, but the crew were too feeble to be able to do so, and the natives coming out in their boats, all were taken prisoners and sent on shore. Sir Richard Bingham, the governor of Connaught, arrived in a few hours, and at once despatched search parties through Clare and Connemara to bring all Spaniards cast ashore alive to the town, and sent his son to Mayo to fetch down all who landed there. But young Bingham's mission proved useless; every Spaniard who had

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landed had been murdered by the natives, well-nigh three thousand having been slain by the axes and knives of the savages who professed to be their co-religionists.

Sir Richard Bingham was regarded as a humane man, but he feared the consequences should the eleven hundred prisoners collected at Galway be restored to health and strength. He had but a handful of troops under him, and had had the greatest difficulty in keeping down the Irish alone. With eleven hundred Spanish soldiers to aid them the task would be impossible, and accordingly he gave orders that all, with the exception of Don Lewis himself, and three or four other nobles, should be executed. The order was carried out; Don Lewis, with those spared, was sent under an escort to Dublin, but the others being too feeble to walk were killed or died on the way, and Don Lewis himself was the sole survivor out of the crews of a dozen ships.

De Leyva, the most popular officer in the Armada, had with him in his ship two hundred and fifty young nobles of the oldest families in Spain. He was twice wrecked. The first time all reached the shore in safety, and were protected by O'Niel, who was virtually the sovereign of the north of Ulster. He treated them kindly for a time. They then took to sea again, but were finally wrecked off Dunluce, and all on board save five perished miserably. Over eight thousand Spaniards died on the Irish coast. Eleven hundred were put to death by Bingham, three thousand murdered by the Irish, the rest drowned; and of the whole Armada but fifty-four vessels, carrying between nine and ten thousand worn-out men, reached Spain, and of the survivors a large proportion afterwards died from the effects of the sufferings they had endured.

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CHAPTER X.

THE WAR IN HOLLAND.

IN the confusion caused by the collision of the *Active* with the Spanish galleon no one had noticed the accident which had befallen Geoffrey Vickars, and his brother's distress was great when, on the ship getting free from among the Spaniards, he discovered that Geoffrey was missing. He had been by his side on the poop but a minute before the mast fell, and had no doubt that he had been carried overboard by its wreck. That he had survived he had not the least hope, and when a week later the *Active* on her way back towards the Thames was driven into Harwich, he at once landed and carried the sad news to his parents. England was wild with joy at its deliverance, but the household at Hedingham was plunged into deep sorrow.

Weeks passed and then Lionel received a letter from Francis Vere saying that Parma's army was advancing into Holland, and that as active work was at hand he had best, if his intentions remained unchanged, join him without delay.

He started two days later for Harwich, and thence took ship for Bergen-op-Zoom. Anchoring at Flushing, he learned that the Duke of Parma had already sat down in front of Bergen-op-Zoom, and had on the 7th attempted to capture Tholen on the opposite side of the channel, but had been repulsed by the regiment of Count Solms, with a loss of 400 men. He had

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then thrown up works against the water forts, and hot fighting had gone on, the garrison making frequent sallies upon the besiegers. The water forts still held out, and the captain therefore determined to continue his voyage into the town. The ship was fired at by the Spanish batteries, but passed safely between the water forts and dropped anchor in the port on the last day of September, Lionel having been absent from Holland just a year. He landed at once and made his way to the lodgings of Francis Vere, by whom he was received with great cordiality.

"I was greatly grieved," he said after the first greetings, "to hear of your brother's death. I felt it as if he had been a near relative of my own. I had hoped to see you both; and that affair concerning which my cousin wrote to me, telling me how cleverly you had discovered a plot against the queen's life, showed me that you would both be sure to make your way. Your father and mother must have felt the blow terribly?"

"They have indeed," Lionel said. "I do not think, however, that they altogether give up hope. They cling to the idea that he may have been picked up by some Spanish ship and may now be a prisoner in Spain."

Francis Vere shook his head.

"Of course, I know," Lionel went on, "their hope is altogether without foundation; for even had Geoffrey gained one of their ships, he would at once have been thrown overboard. Still I rather encouraged the idea, for it is better that hope should die out gradually than be extinguished at a blow; and slight though it was it enabled my father and mother to bear up better than they otherwise would have done. Had it not been for that I believe that my mother would have well-nigh sunk beneath it. I was very glad when I got your letter, for active service will be a distraction to my sorrow. We have ever been together, Geoffrey and I, and I feel like one lost with-

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out him. You have not had much fighting here, I think, since I have been away?"

"No, indeed; you have been far more lucky than I have," Francis Vere said. "With the exception of the fight with the *San Matteo* I have been idle ever since I saw you, for not a shot has been fired here, while you have been taking part in the great fight for the very existence of our country. It is well that Parma has been wasting nine months at Dunkirk, for it would have gone hard with us had he marched hither instead of waiting there for the arrival of the Armada. Our force here has fallen away to well-nigh nothing. The soldiers could get no pay, and were almost starved; their clothes were so ragged that it was pitiful to see them. Great numbers have died, and more gone back to England. As to the Dutch, they are more occupied in quarrelling with us than in preparing for defence, and they would right willingly see us go so that we did but deliver Flushing and Brill and this town back again to them. I was truly glad when I heard that Parma had broken up his camp at Dunkirk when the Armada sailed away, and was marching hither. Now that he has come, it may be that these wretched disputes will come to an end, and that something like peace and harmony will prevail in our councils. He could not have done better, as far as we are concerned, than in coming to knock his head against these walls; for Bergen is far too strong for him to take, and he will assuredly meet with no success here such as would counterbalance in any way the blow that Spanish pride has suffered in the defeat of the Armada. I think, Lionel, that you have outgrown your pageship, and since you have been fighting as a gentleman volunteer in Drake's fleet you had best take the same rank here."

The siege went on but slowly. Vigorous sorties were made, and the cavalry sometimes sallied out from the gates and made excursions as far as Wouw, a village three miles away, and took

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many prisoners. Among these were two commissaries of ordnance, who were intrusted to the safe keeping of the Deputy-Provost Redhead. They were not strictly kept, and were allowed to converse with the provost's friends. One of these, William Grimeston, suspected that one of the commissaries, who pretended to be an Italian, was really an English deserter who had gone over with the traitor Stanley; and in order to see if his suspicions were correct, pretended that he was dissatisfied with his position and would far rather be fighting on the other side. The man at once fell into the trap, acknowledged that he was an Englishman, and said that if Grimeston and Redhead would but follow his advice they would soon become rich men, for that if they could arrange to give up one of the forts to Parma they would be magnificently rewarded.

Redhead and Grimeston pretended to agree, but at once informed Lord Willoughby, who was in command, of the offer that had been made to them. They were ordered to continue their negotiations with the traitor. The latter furnished them with letters to Stanley and Parma, and with these they made their way out of the town at night to the Spanish camp. They had an interview with the duke, and promised to deliver the north water fort over to him, for which service Redhead was to receive 1200 crowns and Grimeston 700 crowns, and a commission in Stanley's regiment of traitors.

Stanley himself entertained them in his tent, and Parma presented them with two gold chains. They then returned to Bergen and related all that had taken place to Lord Willoughby. The matter was kept a profound secret in the town, Francis Vere, who was in command of the north fort, and a few others only being made acquainted with what was going on.

On the appointed night, 22d of October, Grimeston went out alone, Redhead's supposed share of the business being to open the gates of the fort. When Grimeston arrived at Parma's

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camp he found that the Spaniards had become suspicious. He was bound and placed in charge of a Spanish captain, who was ordered to stab him at once if there was any sign of treachery. It was a dark night; the tide was out, for the land over which the Spaniards had to advance was flooded at other times. The attacking column consisted of three thousand men, including Stanley's regiment; and a number of knights and nobles accompanied it as volunteers.

As they approached the forts—Grimeston in front closely guarded by the Spanish captain—it was seen by the assailants that Redhead had kept his word: the drawbridge across the moat was down and the portcullis was up. Within the fort Lord Willoughby, Vere, and two thousand men were waiting them. When about fifty had crossed the drawbridge the portcullis was suddenly let fall and the drawbridge hauled up. As the portcullis thundered down Grimeston tripped up the surprised Spaniard, and, leaping into the water, managed to make his way to the foot of the walls. A discharge of musketry and artillery from the fort killed a hundred and fifty of the attacking party, while those who had crossed the drawbridge were all either killed or taken prisoners. But the water in the moat was low. The Spaniards gallantly waded across and attacked the palisades, but were repulsed in their endeavour to climb them. While the fight was going on the water in the moat was rising, and scores were washed away and drowned as they attempted to return.

Parma continued the siege for some little time, but made no real attempt to take the place after having been repulsed at the north fort; and on the 12th of November broke up his camp and returned to Brussels.

After the siege was over Lord Willoughby knighted twelve of his principal officers, foremost among whom was Francis Vere, who was now sent home with despatches by his general, and

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remained in England until the end of January, when he was appointed sergeant-major-general of the forces, a post of great responsibility and much honour, by Lord Willoughby, with the full approval of the queen's government. He was accompanied on his return by his brother Robert.

A month after Sir Francis Vere's return Lord Willoughby left for England, and the whole burden of operations in the field fell upon Vere. His first trouble arose from the mutinous conduct of the garrison of Gertruydenberg. This was an important town on the banks of the old Maas, and was strongly fortified, one side being protected by the Maas while the river Douge swept round two other sides of its walls. Its governor, Count Hohenlohe, had been unpopular, the troops had received no pay, and there had been a partial mutiny before the siege of Bergen-op-Zoom began. This was appeased by the appointment of Sir John Wingfield, Lord Willoughby's brother-in-law, as its governor.

In the winter the discontent broke out again. The soldiers had been most unjustly treated by the States, and there were long arrears of pay, and at first Sir John Wingfield espoused the cause of the men. Sir Francis Vere tried in vain to arrange matters. The Dutch authorities would not pay up the arrears, the men would not return to their duty until they did so, and at last became so exasperated that they ceased to obey their governor and opened communications with the enemy. Prince Maurice, who was now three and twenty years old, and devoted to martial pursuits and the cause of his countrymen, after consultation with Sir Francis Vere, laid siege to the town and made a furious assault upon it on the water side. But the Dutch troops, although led by Count Solms and Count Philip of Nassau, were repulsed with great loss. The prince then promised not only a pardon, but that the demands of the garrison should be complied with; but it was too late, and four

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days later Gertruydenberg was delivered up by the mutineers to the Duke of Parma, the soldiers being received into the Spanish service, while Wingfield and the officers were permitted to retire.

The States were furious, as this was the third city commanded by Englishmen that had been handed over to the enemy. The bad feeling excited by the treachery of Sir William Stanley and Roland Yorke at Deventer and Zutphen had died out after the gallant defence of the English at Sluys, but now broke out again afresh, and charges of treachery were brought not only against Wingfield but against many other English officers, including Sir Francis Vere. The queen, however, wrote so indignantly to the States that they had to withdraw their charges against most of the English officers.

In May Lord Willoughby, who was still in London, resigned his command. A number of old officers of distinction who might have laid claims to succeed him, among them Sir John Norris, Sir Roger Williams, Sir Thomas Wilford, Sir William Drury, Sir Thomas Baskerville, and Sir John Burrough, were withdrawn from the Netherlands to serve in France or Ireland, and no general-in-chief or lieutenant-general was appointed, Sir Francis Vere as sergeant-major receiving authority to command all soldiers already in the field or to be sent out during the absence of the general and lieutenant-general. His official title was Her Majesty's Sergeant-major in the Field. The garrisons in the towns were under the command of their own governors, and those could supply troops for service in the field according to their discretion.

The appointment of so young a man as Sir Francis Vere to a post demanding not only military ability but great tact and diplomatic power, was abundant proof of the high estimate formed of him by the queen and her counsellors. The position was one of extreme difficulty. He had to keep on

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good terms with the queen and her government, with the government of the States, the English agent at the Hague, Prince Maurice in command of the army of the Netherlands, the English governors of the towns, and the officers or men of the force under his own command. Fortunately Barneveldt, who at that time was the most prominent man in the States, had a high opinion of Vere. Sir Thomas Bodley, the queen's agent, had much confidence in him, and acted with him most cordially, and Prince Maurice entertained a great respect for him, consulted him habitually in all military matters, and placed him in the position of marshal of the camp of the army of the Netherlands, in addition to his own command of the English portion of that army.

Vere's first undertaking was to lead a force of 12,000 men, of whom half were English, to prevent Count Mansfelt from crossing the Maas with an army of equal strength. Prince Maurice was present in person as general-in-chief. Intrenchments were thrown up and artillery planted; but just as Mansfelt was preparing to cross his troops mutinied, and he was obliged to fall back.

In October, with 900 of his own troops and twelve companies of Dutch horse, Sir Francis Vere succeeded in throwing a convoy of provisions into the town of Rheinberg, which was besieged by a large force of the enemy. As soon as he returned the States requested him to endeavour to throw in another convoy, as Count Mansfelt was marching to swell the force of the besiegers, and after his arrival it would be well-nigh impossible to send further aid into the town. Vere took with him 900 English and 900 Dutch infantry, and 800 Dutch cavalry. The enemy had possession of a fortified country house called Loo, close to which lay a thick wood traversed only by a narrow path, with close undergrowth and swampy ground on either side. The enemy were in great force around

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Loo, and came out to attack the expedition as it passed through the wood. Sending the Dutch troops on first, Vere attacked the enemy vigorously with his infantry and drove them back to the inclosure of Loo. As soon as his whole force had crossed the wood, he halted them and ordered them to form in line of battle facing the wood through which they had just passed, and from which the enemy were now pouring out in great force.

In order to give time to his troops to prepare for the action Vere took half his English infantry and advanced against them. They moved forward, and a stubborn fight took place between the pikemen. Vere's horse was killed, and fell on him so that he could not rise; but the English closed round him, and he was rescued with no other harm than a bruised leg and several pike-thrusts through his clothes. While the conflict between the pikemen was going on the English arquebusiers opened fire on the flank of the enemy, and they began to fall back. Four times they rallied and charged the English, but were at last broken and scattered through the wood. The cavalry stationed there left their horses and fled through the undergrowth. Pressing forward the little English force next fell upon twenty-four companies of Neapolitan infantry, who were defeated without difficulty. The four hundred and fifty Englishmen then joined the main force, which marched triumphantly with their convoy of provisions into Rheinberg, and the next morning fortunately turning thick and foggy the force made its way back without interruption by the enemy.

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CHAPTER XI.

IN SPAIN.

ALONE among the survivors of the great Spanish Armada, Geoffrey Vickars saw the coast of Ireland fade away from sight without a feeling of satisfaction or relief. His hope had been that the ship would be wrecked on her progress down the coast. He knew not that the wild Irish were slaying all whom the sea spared, and that ignorant as they were of the English tongue, he would undoubtedly have shared the fate of his Spanish companions. He thought only of the risk of being drowned, and would have preferred taking this to the certainty of a captivity perhaps for life in the Spanish prisons. The part that he had played since he had been picked up off Gravelines could not be sustained indefinitely. He might as well spend his life in prison, where at least there would be some faint hope of being exchanged, as wander about Spain all his life as an imbecile beggar.

As soon, therefore, as he saw that the perils of the coast of Ireland were passed, and that the vessel was likely to reach Spain in safety, he determined that he would on reaching a port disclose his real identity. There were on board several Scotch and Irish volunteers, and he decided to throw himself upon the pity of one of these rather than on that of the Spaniards. He did not think that in any case his life was in danger. Had

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he been detected when first picked up, or during the early part of the voyage, he would doubtless have been thrown overboard without mercy; but now that the passions of the combatants had subsided, and that he had been so long among them, and had, as he believed, won the good-will of many by the assistance he had rendered to the sick and wounded, he thought that there was little fear of his life being taken in cold blood.

One of the Irish volunteers, Gerald Burke by name, had for a long time been seriously ill, and Geoffrey had in many small ways shown him kindness as he lay helpless on the deck, and he determined finally to confide in him. Although still very weak, Burke was now convalescent, and was sitting alone by the poop-rail gazing upon the coast of Spain with eager eyes, when Geoffrey, under the pretext of coiling down a rope, approached him. The young man nodded kindly to him.

"Our voyage is nearly over, my poor lad," he said in Spanish, "and your troubles now will be worse than mine. You have given me many a drink of water from your scanty supply, and I wish that I could do something for you in return; but I know that you do not even understand what I say to you."

"Would you give me an opportunity of speaking to you after nightfall, Mr. Burke," Geoffrey said in English, "when no one will notice us speaking?"

The Irishman gave a start of astonishment at hearing himself addressed in English.

"My life is in your hands, sir; pray, do not betray me," Geoffrey said rapidly as he went on coiling down the rope.

"I will be at this place an hour after nightfall," the young Irishman replied when he recovered from his surprise. "Your secret will be safe with me."

At the appointed time Geoffrey returned to the spot. The decks were now deserted, for a drizzling rain was falling, and

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all save those on duty had retired below, happy in the thought that on the following morning they would be in port.

"Now, tell me who you are," the young Irishman began. "I thought you were a Spanish sailor, one of those we picked up when the Spanish galleon next to us foundered."

Geoffrey then told him how he had been knocked off an English ship by the fall of a mast, had swum to the galleon and taken refuge beneath her bowsprit until she sank, and how, when picked up and carried on to the Spanish ship, he feigned to have lost his senses in order to conceal his ignorance of Spanish.

"I knew," he said, "that were I recognized as English at the time I should at once be killed, but I thought that if I could conceal who I was for a time I should simply be sent to the galleys, where I have heard that there are many English prisoners working."

"I think death would have been preferable to that lot," Mr. Burke said.

"Yes, sir; but there is always the hope of escape or of exchange. When you spoke kindly to me this afternoon I partly understood what you said, for in this long time I have been on board I have come to understand a little Spanish, and I thought that maybe you would assist me in some way."

"I would gladly do so, though I regard Englishmen as the enemies of my country; but in what way can I help you? I could furnish you with a disguise, but your ignorance of Spanish would lead to your detection immediately."

"I have been thinking it over, sir, and it seemed to me that as there will be no objection to my landing to-morrow, thinking as they do that I have lost my senses, I might join you after you once got out of the town. I have some money in my waistbelt, and if you would purchase some clothes for me I might then join you as your servant as you ride along. At the

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