HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

BY RIGHT OF CONQUEST; OR, WITH CORTEZ IN MEXICO

George Henty

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Henty G.

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Содержание

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Preface

The conquest of Mexico, an extensive empire with a numerous and warlike population, by a mere handful of Spaniards, is one of the romances of history. Indeed, a writer of fiction would scarcely have dared to invent so improbable a story. Even the bravery of the Spaniards, and the advantage of superior arms would not have sufficed to give them the victory, had it not been that Mexico was ripe for disruption. The Aztecs, instead of conciliating by wise and gentle government the peoples they had conquered, treated them with such despotic harshness that they were ready to ally themselves with the invaders, and to join with them heartily against the central power; so that instead of battling against an empire single-handed, the Spaniards had really only to war with a great city, and were assisted by a vast army of auxiliaries.

Fortunately, the details of the extraordinary expedition of Cortez were fully related by contemporary writers, several of whom were eyewitnesses of the scenes they described. It was not necessary for me, however, to revert to these; as Prescott, in his admirable work on the conquest of Mexico, has given a summary of them; and has drawn a most vivid picture of the events of the campaign. The book far surpasses in interest any volume of fiction, and I should strongly recommend my readers to take the first opportunity that occurs of perusing the whole story, of which I have only been able to touch upon the principal events.

While history is silent as to the voyage of the Swan, it is recorded by the Spaniards that an English ship did, in 1517 or 1518, appear off the port of San Domingo, and was fired at by them, and chased from the islands; but it was not until some twenty or thirty years later that the English buccaneers openly sailed to challenge the supremacy of the Spaniards among the Western Islands, and to dispute their pretensions to exclude all other flags but their own from those waters. It may, however, be well believed that the ship spoken of was not the only English craft that entered the Spanish main; and that the adventurous traders of the West country, more than once, dispatched ships to carry on an illicit trade there. Such enterprises would necessarily be conducted with great secrecy, until the relations between Spain and England changed, and religious differences broke up the alliance that existed between them during the early days of Henry the 8th.

G. A. Henty.

Chapter 1: A Startling Proposal

On March 3rd, 1516, the trading vessel the Swan dropped anchor at Plymouth. She would in our days be considered a tiny craft indeed, but she was then looked upon as a large vessel, and one of which her owner, Master Diggory Beggs, had good reason to be proud. She was only of some eighty tons burden, but there were few ships that sailed out from Plymouth of much larger size; and Plymouth was even then rising into importance as a seaport, having flourished mightily since the downfall of its once successful rival–Fowey. Large ships were not needed in those days, for the only cargoes sent across the sea were costly and precious goods, which occupied but small space. The cloths of the Flemings, the silks and satins of Italy, the produce of the East, which passed first through the hands of the Venetian and Genoese merchants, and the wines of France and Spain were the chief articles of commerce. Thus the freight for a vessel of eighty tons was a heavy venture, and none but merchants of wealth and position would think of employing larger ships. In this respect the Spaniards and the Italian Republics were far ahead of us, and the commerce of England was a small thing, indeed, in comparison with that of Flanders.

In Plymouth, however, the Swan was regarded as a goodly ship; and Master Diggory Beggs was heartily congratulated, by his acquaintances, when the news came that the Swan was sailing up the Sound, having safely returned from a voyage to Genoa.

As soon as the anchor was dropped and the sails were furled, the captain, Reuben Hawkshaw, a cousin of Master Beggs, took his place in the boat, accompanied by his son Roger, a lad of sixteen, and was rowed by two sailors to the landing place. They were delayed for a few minutes there by the number of Reuben's acquaintances, who thronged round to shake him by the hand; but as soon as he had freed himself of these, he strode up the narrow street from the quays to the house of Master Diggory.

Reuben Hawkshaw was a tall, powerfully built man, weatherbeaten and tanned from his many comings and goings upon the sea; with a voice that could be heard in the loudest storm, and a fierce look–but, as his men knew, gentle and kind at heart, though very daring; and having, as it seemed, no fear of danger either from man or tempest.

Roger was large boned and loosely jointed, and was likely some day to fill out into as big a man as his father, who stood over six-feet-two without his shoes.

Reuben was wont to complain that he, himself, was too big for shipboard.

"If a crew were men wholly of my size," he would say, "a ship would be able to carry but a scant crew; for, lie they as close as they would, there would not be room for a full complement below."

For indeed, in those days space was precious, and on board a ship men were packed well-nigh as close as they could lie; having small thought of comfort, and being well content if there was room to turn, without angering those lying next on either side.

The merchant, who was so stout and portly that he offered a strong contrast to his cousin, rose from his desk as the latter entered.

"I am glad, indeed, to see you back, Cousin Reuben; and trust that all has fared well with you."

"Indifferent well, Cousin Diggory. We have a good stock of Italian goods on board; but as, of course, these took up but a small portion of her hold, I put into Cadiz on my way back. There I filled up with three-score barrels of Spanish wine, which will, I warrant me, return good profit on the price I paid for them."

"And you have met with no accidents or adventures, Reuben?"

"Not more than is useful. We had a fight with some Moorish pirates, who coveted the goods with which, as they doubtless guessed, we were laden; but we beat them off stoutly, with a loss of only six men killed among us. We had bad weather coming up the Portugal Coast, and had two men washed overboard; and we had another stabbed in a drunken brawl in the street. And besides these there are, of course, many who were wounded in the fight with the Moors and in drunken frays ashore; but all are doing well, and the loss of a little blood will not harm them, so our voyage may be termed an easy and pleasant one.

"That is well," the merchant said, in a tone of satisfaction. "We cannot expect a voyage like this to pass without accident.

"And how are you, Roger?" he asked, turning to the boy, who was standing near the door with his cap in his hand, until it should please his elders to address him.

"I am well, I thank you, Master Diggory. It is seldom that anything ails with me. I trust that Mistress Mercy and my cousins are well."

"You had best go upstairs, and see them for yourself, Roger. Your father and I have weighty matters to talk over, and would fain be alone."

Roger was glad to escape from the merchant's counting house and, bowing to his cousin, went off with a quiet step; which, after he had closed the door behind him, was changed into a rapid bound as he ascended the stairs.

"Gently, Roger," Mistress Beggs said, as he entered the room where she and her two daughters were sitting, at work. "We are truly glad to see you, but you must remember that we stay-at-home people are not accustomed to the boisterous ways of the sea."

The reproof was administered in a kindly tone, but Roger colored to the hair; for indeed, in his delight at being back again, he had forgotten the manners that were expected from a lad of his age, on shore. However, he knew that, although Mistress Beggs was somewhat precise in her ways, she was thoroughly kind; and always treated him as if he were a nephew of her own, rather than a young cousin of her husband's. He therefore recovered at once from his momentary confusion, and stepped forward to receive the salute Mistress Beggs always gave him, on his return from his voyages.

"Dorothy, Agnes, you remember your Cousin Roger?"

The two girls, who had remained seated at their work–which had, however, made but little progress since their father had run in, two hours before, to say that the Swan was signaled in the Sound–now rose, and each made a formal courtesy, and then held up her cheek to be kissed, according to the custom of the day; but there was a little smile of amusement on their faces that would have told a close observer that, had their mother not been present, their greeting would have been a warmer and less ceremonious one.

"Well, well, Roger," Mistress Beggs went on, "it is marvelous to see how fast you grow! Why, it is scarce six months since you sailed away, and you seem half a head taller than you were when you went! And so the Swan has returned safely, without damage or peril?"

"No damage to speak of, Cousin Mercy, save for a few shot holes in her hull, and a good many patches on her side–the work of a Moorish corsair, with whom we had a sharp brush by the way."

"And was there loss of life, Roger?"

"We have come back nine hands shorter than we sailed with, and there are a few on board still unfit for hard work."

"And did you fight, Cousin Roger?" Dorothy Beggs asked.

"I did what I could with my bow, until I got alongside, and then joined in the melee as well as I could. The heathen fought bravely, but they were not a match for our men; being wanting in weight and strength, and little able to stand up against the crushing blows of our axes. But they are nimble and quick with their curved swords; and the fierceness of their faces, and their shouting, would have put men out of countenance who had less reason to be confident than ours."

"And the trading has gone well?" asked Mistress Beggs, who was known to have a keen eye to the main chance.

"I believe that my father's well satisfied, Cousin Mercy, and that the venture has turned out fully as well as he looked for."

"That is well, Roger.

"Do you girls go on with your work. You can sew while you are listening. I will go and see that the preparations for dinner are going on regularly, for the maids are apt to give way to talk and gossip, when they know that the Swan is in."

As soon as she had left the room, the two girls threw down their work and, running across to Roger, saluted him most heartily.

"That is a much better welcome," Roger said, "than the formal greetings you before gave me. I wonder what Cousin Mercy would have said, had she chanced to come in again."

"Mother guessed well enough what it would be, when we were alone together," Dorothy said, laughing. "She always thinks it right on special occasions to keep us to our manners, and to make us sure that we know how it is becoming to behave; but you know well, Roger, that she is not strict with us generally, and likes us to enjoy ourselves. When we are staying up at the farm with Aunt Peggy, she lets us run about as we will; and never interferes with us, save when our spirits carry us away altogether. I think we should be glad if we always lived in the country.

"But now, Roger, let us hear much more about your voyage, and the fight with the Moors. Are they black men?"

"Not at all, Dorothy. They are not very much darker than our own fishermen, when they are bronzed by the sun and wind. There are black men who live somewhere near their country, and there were several of these fighting with them. These blacks are bigger men than the Moors, and have thick lips and wide mouths. I believe that they live as slaves among the Moors, but those who were with them fought as bravely as they did; and it needed a man with a stout heart to engage with them, so ugly were their faces."

"Were you not terrified, Roger?"

"I was frightened at first, Dorothy, and felt a strange weakness in my knees, as they began to swarm up the ship's side; but it passed off when the scuffle began. You see, there was no time to think about it. We all had to do our best, and even had I been frightened ever so badly, I hope that I should not have showed it, for it would have brought shame upon my father as well as myself; but in truth I thought little about it, one way or the other. There they were on the deck, and had to be driven back again; and we set about the work like Englishmen and honest men and, thanks to our pikes and axes, we had not very much trouble about it; especially when we once became fairly angered, on seeing some of our friends undone by the heathen.

"I myself would rather go through two or three such fights, than encounter such another storm as we had off the coast of Portugal, for four days. It seemed that we must be lost, the waves were of such exceeding bigness–far surpassing anything I had ever seen before. My heart was in my mouth scores of times, and over and over again I thought that she would never rise again, so great was the weight of water that poured over her. Truly it was the mercy of God which alone saved us, for I believe that even my father thought the ship would be beaten to pieces, though he kept up a show of confidence in order to inspirit the men. However, at the end of the fourth day the gale abated; but it was days before the great sea went down, the waves coming in long regular hills, which seemed to me as big as those which we have here in Devonshire; but smooth and regular, so that while we rolled mightily, there was naught to fear from them."

"I should not like to be a sailor," Agnes said. "It would be far better, Roger, were you to come into our father's counting house. You know he would take you into his business, did Cousin Reuben desire it."

Roger laughed.

"I should make but a poor penman, Agnes. I love the sea dearly, and it is seldom that we have such gales to meet as that; and after all, it is no worse to be drowned than it is to come to any other death. I am well content, cousin, with matters as they are; and would not stay ashore and spend my life in writing, not to be as rich as the greatest merchant in Plymouth. I almost wish, sometimes, I had been born a Spaniard or a Portugal; for then I might have a chance of sailing to wondrous new countries, instead of voyaging only in European waters."

"It seems to me that you have plenty to see as it is, Roger," Dorothy said.

"I do not say nay to that," Roger assented; "but I do not see why Spain and Portugal should claim all the Indies, East and West, and keep all others from going there."

"But the pope has given the Indies to them," Dorothy said.

"I don't see that they were the pope's to give," Roger replied. "That might do for the king, and his minister Wolsey, and the bishops; but when in time all the people have read, as we do, Master Wycliffe's Bible, they will come to see that there is no warrant for the authority the pope claims; and then we may, perhaps, take our share of these new discoveries."

"Hush, Roger! You should not speak so loud about the Bible. You know that though there are many who read it, it is not a thing to be spoken of openly; and that it would bring us all into sore trouble, were anyone to hear us speak so freely as you have done. There has been burning of Lollards, and they say that Wolsey is determined to root out all the followers of Wycliffe."

"It will take him some trouble to do that," Roger said, shrugging his shoulders. "Still, I will be careful, Dorothy, for I would not on any account bring trouble upon you, here. But, thank Heaven, England is not Spain, where men are forever being tortured and burned for their religion. The English would never put up with that. It may be that there will be persecution, but methinks it is rather those whose opinions lead them to make speeches that are regarded as seditious, and who stir up the people into discontent, who fall into trouble; and that, as long as folks hold their own opinions in peace and quiet, and trouble not others, neither king nor cardinal will seek to interfere with them.

"It is not so in Spain. There, upon the slightest suspicion that a man or woman holds views differing from those of the priests, he is dragged away and thrown into the prisons of the Inquisition, and tortured and burned."

Mistress Mercy now returned, and she and the girls busied themselves in laying the table for dinner.

That evening, after Mistress Mercy, the girls, and Roger had retired to bed, Reuben Hawkshaw and his cousin had a long talk together, concerning the next voyage of the Swan. After Master Diggory had discussed the chances of a voyage to the low countries, or another trip to the Mediterranean, Reuben, who had been silently listening to him, said:

"Well, Cousin Diggory, to tell you the truth, I have been turning over a project that seems to me to offer a chance of greater profit, though I deem it not without risk. That is the case, of course, with all trading affairs; and, as you know, the greater the risk the greater the profit, so the question to be considered is whether the profit is in fair proportion to the risk run. I think that it is, in this case, and I am ready to risk my life in carrying it out. It is for you to consider whether you are ready to risk your venture."

"What is it, Reuben? There are no other voyages that I know of; unless, indeed, you think of sailing up to Constantinople, and trading with the Grand Turk."

"My thoughts go farther afield still, Diggory. It is a matter I have thought over for some time, and when I was at Cadiz the other day I made many inquiries, and these have confirmed me in my opinions on the matter. You know that the Spaniards are gaining huge wealth from the Indies, and I heard at Cadiz that, after the conquest they made, a year since, of the island they call Cuba, the stores of precious things brought home were vast indeed. As you know, they bring from there gold and spices and precious woods, and articles of native workmanship of all kinds."

"I know all that, Reuben; and also that, like dogs in the manger, they suffer none others to sail those seas; and that no English ship has ever yet traversed those waters."

"That is so, Diggory; but by all I hear the number of islands is large, and there are reports that there lies, farther west, a great land from which it is they procure, chiefly, the gold and silver and precious things. Now it seems to me that, were the matter secretly conducted, so that no news could be sent to Spain, a ship might slip out and cruise there, dealing with the natives, and return richly stored with treasures.

"The Swan is a fast sailer and, did she fall in with the Spanish ships, would show them a clean pair of heels. Of course she would avoid the places where the Spaniards have forts and garrisons, and touch only at those at which, I hear, they trade but little;" and he took out a scroll from his bosom, unrolled it, and showed it to be a map.

"This I purchased, for ten gold pieces, of a Spanish captain who had come to poverty and disgrace from his ship being cast away, while he was asleep in liquor, in his cabin–a fault which is rare among the Spaniards, and therefore thought all the more of. I met him in Cadiz, at a wine shop near the port. He told me his story as we drank together, for he spoke Dutch, having traded much with the Low Countries.

"He took out a map, to show me some of the places at which he had had adventures. I said that the thing was curious, and would buy it of him, if he was disposed to sell. He said that it would be as much as his life were worth to part with it, to an Englishman; and, indeed, that it was only captains of ships trading in those seas who were allowed to have them, seeing that all matters connected with the islands were held as a state secret. After some trouble and chaffering, however, he agreed to make me an exact copy, and to sell it me for ten gold pieces.

"This is the copy. It is exact, for I compared it with the original, before I paid for it. Now here, you see, are laid down the position and bearing of all the islands, together with all the ports and places where the Spaniards have their settlements. This line over here represents the mainland, but it is, as you see, but vaguely drawn; seeing that, except at one or two points, the Spaniards themselves have but little knowledge of it. Now it seems that, with the help of this, I might so navigate the Swan as to avoid much risk of falling in with the Dons; and might yet make a shift to fill up the ship with goods of all kinds, such as would sell here for great prices. I know, of course, that were we taken we should be killed without mercy; but in the first place they would have to catch us, which would not be easy; and in the second to capture us, which, methinks would be more difficult still, seeing that a crew of stout Devonshire lads, fighting with halters round their necks, would give a good account of themselves, even if overhauled by a great Spanish galleon.

"What think you of the scheme, Cousin Diggory?"

"It is a perilous one, certainly, Reuben," the merchant replied, after a long silence. "There is the risk of the loss of the ship and all her freight, and there is the risk of the loss of your life and of those of the crew; and I would rather lose even the Swan, Reuben, than that harm should come to you and Roger. Then it may well be that, even if you carried the scheme to a successful end, and returned laden with wealth, the king and his counselors, when the matter came to their ears–which it would be sure to do on your return, for it would make a prodigious talk–might be grievously offended, accuse us of embroiling England with Spain, confiscate the cargo, visit me with fine and imprisonment, and treat you and the crew as pirates."

"I do not fear that," Reuben said. "Our relations with Spain have grown cold, lately, and there is a talk of peace between us and France. In the next place, I should say that the king would be mightily glad to see a chance of us English having a finger in this pie, that the Spaniards want to keep to themselves; and that he will perceive that great advantage will arise, from our obtaining a share of the trade with the Indies. There is a rare jealousy in the country, at the Spaniards and Portugals keeping all the trade of both the Indies in their hands; and methinks that, even if he judged it necessary to make a show of displeasure against the men who led the way in this matter, there would in the end be much honor, as well as profit, in this venture."

"It is a grave matter, Reuben, and one not to be undertaken without much thought and calculation. Still, I own that the proposal is a tempting one, and that the possession of this map, which I will examine at my leisure, would help you much in your enterprise. Truly, as you say, although the king might frown, there would be much honor as well as profit in being the first English merchant to dispatch a ship to the Spanish main. I love not the Spaniards and, like all Englishmen who think as I do on matters of religion, have viewed with much disfavor our alliance with men who are such cruel persecutors of all who are not of their religion."

"I hate them," Reuben Hawkshaw said, energetically. "They swagger as if they were the lords of the world, and hold all others as of no account beside them. If you resolve on this enterprise I shall, of course, do my utmost to avoid them; but should they try to lay hand on us, I shall be right glad to show them that we Englishmen hold ourselves fully a match for them."

"Well, well, we must not think of that," Diggory Beggs said, hastily; "but, nevertheless, cousin, if the Swan sails for those seas, I will see that she is well provided with ordnance and small arms, so that she shall be able to hold her own with those who would meddle with her."

"That is all I ask, Diggory. We shan't meddle with them, if they do not meddle with us; but if they treat us as pirates, to be slain without form of trial, they must not blame us if we act as pirates when they come upon us. They hold that they are beyond the law, when they are once beyond sight of land, going westward; and we have only to take them at their word.

"As to piracy, if the things that are whispered as to their cruelty to the natives be true, pirates are an innocent and kindly folk compared to them. They openly proclaim that all found in these seas, which they claim as their own, will be treated as enemies and slain without mercy; and we shall be, therefore, fully justified in treating as an enemy any Spanish ship that we may come across; and holding her as a fair prize, if we are strong enough to take her."

"But you must not go out with that intent, Reuben. If I fit out the Swan to go to the Indies, it is that she may trade honestly with such natives as are ready to trade with her, and not that she may wage war against the Spaniards."

"I quite understand that, Cousin Diggory," Reuben Hawkshaw said, with a grim smile; "and that also is my intent, if the Spaniards will but let me adhere to it; only if we are attacked, we must defend ourselves. If they try to capture us, and we beat them, it is but natural that we should capture them."

"Against that I have nothing to say, Reuben. I can find no authority, in Scripture, for the Spaniards claiming a portion of the seas as their right. The world is all, as it seems to me, open to trade, and neither the pope nor anyone else has a right to parcel it out, for the exclusive use of one or two nations. As we all know, the seas within a mile or two of shore are held to belong, naturally, to those who own the land; but that is a different thing, altogether, to holding that more than half the seas, inasmuch as we know of them, are to be held as private property by Spaniards and Portugals.

"Well, we will say no more about it, at present. There is plenty of time to think it over, while the Swan is unloading. I certainly do not like to take so great a risk as this would be on my own shoulders; but if I could get two or three others to join me, I should be willing enough to embark upon it."

"I need not tell you, Diggory, that it behooves you to be right careful as to those to whom you may broach it. Remember that an incautious word might ruin the enterprise altogether. If so much as a whisper of it reached the ear of the Spanish ambassador in London, he would apply to the king to put a stop to it; and whatever King Harry might think of it, he could hardly permit the Swan to sail in the face of such a remonstrance, for to do so would assuredly embroil him with Spain."

"I will be careful, Reuben; for I see this as well as you do, and shall only speak to men who have, before now, worked with me in joint adventures, and on whose discretion I can surely rely. I will talk the matter over with them, Reuben, first; and if they appear favorably disposed, you shall meet them here, show them your map, and explain your intentions fully to them. If three others join me, in equal shares, I shall propose that, as it is your idea, and as you have obtained this map, you shall have an equal share with each of us in the business; and shall, in addition to your pay as master, take one-fifth of the profits, after payment of expenses. Will that content you?"

"Right well, Cousin Diggory; and from this moment I shall, I can tell you, regard myself as a rich man."

The unloading of the Swan occupied some time. There was no undue haste, in those days. The bales were hoisted by whips from the hold, and then carried up to Master Beggs' warehouse. The sailors had earned a fair time for repose, after the hardships of the voyage, and took matters easily, and it was more than a week before the Swan's hold was empty.

During that time the merchant had not made any allusion, to Reuben, as to their conversation on the evening after the Swan came into port. But Reuben was neither surprised nor anxious at this silence. He knew that his cousin although an enterprising was a cautious man, and had hardly hoped to find his proposal so favorably entertained. He had looked for absolute refusal at first, and expected that he would only arrive at his end after long disputes and discussion. Therefore he doubted not that Diggory was turning the matter over and over in his mind, settling the details, and perhaps broaching the matter to the merchants he had spoken of.

The Swan, once empty, was laid up on the shore; where she dried at low tide, so that she could have her seams caulked, and a coat of pitch laid on below the waterline, and be made tight and sound for any voyage on which she might be dispatched. Reuben Hawkshaw had lost his wife years before and, when in port at Plymouth, always occupied lodgings in a house a short distance from that of his cousin; spending his evenings mostly at Master Diggory's, but refusing to take his breakfast or dinner there.

"I know what is what, cousin," he would say, when the merchant pressed him and Roger to come to breakfast or dinner. "Women are women and, as is only right, they hold to the nicety of things; and nothing displeases them more than for people to come in late for their meals. When I am at work I work, and if when the clock strikes the hour for meals I am in the middle of a job, I see that it is finished before the men knock off. Then there is the matter of washing and cleaning up, for one gathers much dust and dirt in the hold of a ship; so that, do what I would, Roger and I could never reckon upon being punctual, and the matter would weigh on my mind when I ought to be thinking of other things. No, no, Diggory, we will be free men, taking our bite and sup on board, as we can make shift to get them; and then, when work is over, coming with clean hands and a clear mind, to supper with you. When the Swan's hold is empty, it will be time enough to talk about amusement."

The evening after the unlading of the cargo was completed, Master Diggory said to his wife:

"Get the table cleared as soon as you can, Mercy, and bring two flasks of that last batch of Spanish wine out of the cellar, and put them and some cups on the board. I have two or three friends coming in, to talk over a matter of business with Reuben and me."

As soon as the table was cleared, Roger asked permission of his aunt to take his cousins for a walk upon the Hoe. This was readily granted, as there was no other room in which they could well be bestowed; and having set the wine upon the table, Dame Mercy retired to look after domestic matters, of which she always found an abundance to occupy her.

In a short time Master Turnbull, Master Streatham, and Master Winslow, three worshipful traders of Plymouth, arrived.

"Cousin Reuben," Master Diggory said, "I have spoken to these good friends of mine in respect of that venture which you proposed to me, and they would fain hear more of it, from your own lips. You can speak with confidence before them; for, whether they agree to cast in their lot with us or not, no word of this matter will pass their lips."

Reuben addressed himself to his task, and that at much greater detail than he had given, when first speaking of the matter to Diggory. He told them what he had gathered from the sea captains, and others, as to the articles with which the Dons traded with the natives. That they were for the most part cheap and common, and that the amount required for a sufficient stock of such merchandise would be very small. Small hand mirrors, strings of colored glass beads, brass rings and trinkets, colored handkerchiefs and bright cloths, were the articles chiefly used in barter. Knives and axes were greatly prized, the natives considering iron to be more valuable than silver or gold. Small bells and brass vessels were also valued, and iron spear and arrow heads were eagerly sought for; but the Spaniards were chary of providing such goods, seeing that they might be used in conflicts against themselves.

Then he produced a list of the stores that would be required for the ship and crew.

"In this matter," he said, "you will think, perhaps, that my demands are excessive; but I am of opinion that money in this way would be well spent. As a rule–though I say it before men accustomed to victualing ships–our crews are vilely provided for. Salt meat they must eat, for no other can be obtained at sea; but it should be of good quality, likewise the other provisions. I want not biscuits that are alive with maggots, nor moldy flour, nor peas or other things that cattle would turn up their noses at. I want everything to be the very best of its kind, with cider good, and sound, and in fair abundance.

"This is not an ordinary voyage. We shall be away for many months, maybe for a year or two; and unless the men are well fed they will assuredly lose their health, and likely enough become mutinous. If we come upon a Spanish ship when three parts of the crew are weak with scurvy, we shall make but a poor fight of it. Therefore, I want to keep my men in good strength and in good heart, and to do this they must be well fed. Such a voyage as this no English ship has ever made before and, cooped up as we shall be in the Swan–for we must carry a great crew–everything depends upon there being no fair ground for grumbling. Many a ship has been lost from the crew being weakened by scurvy, and if you are to bring this enterprise to a good end, I say that there must be no stint in the matter of provisions, and that all must be the very best of their kind.

"I trust that, once out there, we shall be able to obtain an abundance of fruit and vegetables from the natives; for these are things, above all, necessary to keep men's blood sweet on shipboard.

"Then, as to arms. I think we should carry twelve pieces, six of a side; of which four should be of good size, and yet not too large to be quickly handled. In the matter of weight, the Spaniards are sure to have the advantage of us; but if we can shoot much more quickly than they can, it will equalize matters. Then, of course, there will be bows and arrows. I do not hold greatly to the new musketoons–a man can shoot six arrows while he can fire one of them, and that with a straighter and truer aim, though it is true they can carry somewhat farther. Then, of course, there will be pikes, and boarding axes, and a good stock of powder and balls for the cannon. These are the complete lists I have made out.

"Now I hold that we should carry from eighty to a hundred men. These I should pay only the ordinary rate of wage, but each should have an interest in the venture, according to his rank. As to the profits, I would leave it to you, my masters, to reckon; but seeing that in fair trade one can get gold, to say nothing of silver, weight for weight for iron; and other things in proportion; you can judge for yourselves what it will amount to–to say nothing of the chance of our falling in with a Spanish treasure ship, which may be rash enough, regarding us an easy prize, to fall foul of us."

"There is no doubt that the profits will be great, if you return safely home, Master Hawkshaw," Nicholas Turnbull said; "but the chances of that seem but small."

"I think that the chances are good enough to risk my life upon, Master Turnbull," Reuben replied; "and no man can show greater confidence than that. This is the map of which my Cousin Diggory has no doubt spoken to you. You see that the islands are many, and some of them great; and that the places at which the Spaniards have ports are few, in comparison. We have to avoid these, but anywhere else we can open trade with the natives. If we are chased, and find the place too hot for us, we can make away to the mainland and, cruising along there, may come upon places that the Spaniards have never visited, and may there gather great store of gold and silver, without danger. But I wish no one, and certainly not my Cousin Diggory, to enter upon this affair unless with confidence and good heart. I would far rather take a horse and travel to Bristol, and lay my scheme before some of the traders there."

This idea was most distasteful to the traders, for Plymouth regarded Bristol with great jealousy; and Diggory Beggs at once said:

"No, no, Reuben. My friend Master Nicholas Turnbull did not mean that he regarded your scheme as hopeless, only that the risks were doubtless great. But we all know that to earn great profit one must run such risk; and the venture, divided between four of us, would not be a very heavy one–that is to say, not beyond what we are justified in periling.

"Would you leave us for a while, Reuben? We will examine these lists that you have made, and reckon up the total cost; and we shall then see the better how much we shall each have to contribute, to make up our venture."

Reuben nodded and, putting on his hat, left the room, saying, "In an hour I will return;" and then strolled over to a tavern much frequented by the masters of the ships in the port.

Chapter 2: Bound To Unknown Parts

When Reuben Hawkshaw returned to the chamber where Diggory Beggs was in conference with the other three traders, he found that these had finished their calculations.

"The matter is settled, Reuben, as far as we are concerned. My three friends and myself will go equal shares in the matter. The value of the Swan is to be taken as part of my contribution, and if she ever comes back again, as we hope she may do, that sum will be deducted from my share of the profits, due allowance being made for what damage or injury she may have suffered. You, it is understood, will take a share of the profits equal to ours, and one-third share will, in the first place, be set aside to be divided among the other officers and crew. It will be left entirely to you to choose your officers and men, and I need not tell you the sort of fellows to pick out for such a business.

"I shall see that the Swan is provided with new rigging and gear, and that there is a plentiful store of all things on board, to repair any damage you may suffer from storm or foe. My good friends here are willing that the purchasing of all the stores required shall be in my hands, and you shall yourself test the quality of all the provisions before the bargains are concluded, so as to see that everything is sweet and wholesome. My friends here will not appear in the affair at all, for if folks saw that four of us were concerned in the venture, they would think that it was something quite out of ordinary.

"All preparation will be made as quietly as possible, and it will be given out that the Swan is going to make a voyage to the Levant, and that she will carry a stronger battery of guns than usual to beat off any Moorish pirates she may meet by the way. As it is known that she had a sharp fight, coming homeward, it will seem only natural that we should add to her armament. I shall write up to my agent in London to purchase for me the articles required to trade with the natives, and bid him send them round here by sea, well packed in bales. If we were to purchase so many strange articles, here, it would give rise to talk; for people would wonder with whom we intended to trade such goods.

"Tomorrow morning you and I will make out a list of what you deem advisable for the purpose."

For another hour the party sat and talked; for, now that the other traders had fully determined to go into the venture, they were quite excited over it.

"Truly if I could but be spared from my business, here, I would gladly go with you myself," Master Streatham said. "I have always had a longing to see strange climes, and as no Englishman has yet set eyes on these countries you are about to visit, Friend Reuben, I would gladly be by your side, and take share in your perils and adventures."

"I doubt not your heart and courage, Master Jonas," Reuben replied, "and would warrant that you would behave doughtily, in case of fight with Spaniard or Indian; but I question whether you would support the hardships of the voyage, as cheerfully as you would the dangers. Although you may store the Swan with the best provisions that money can buy, a diet of naught but biscuit and salt meat palls after some weeks–to say nothing of some months–of it; and this all the more in a hot climate, where the appetite weakens, and one comes to pine for dainty cakes such as our Devonshire wives are famous for."

"Yes, I fear I never should support that," Master Streatham, who was a large corpulent man, mightily fond of the pleasures of the table, agreed with a sigh.

"Besides, Friend Jonas," Diggory Beggs put in, "Mistress Tabitha would have her voice in the matter; and however much your spirit would lead you to such an adventure, I doubt whether she would let you put foot on board."

"No, it is not for us to be running after adventure," Nicholas Turnbull said. "In the first place, we are sober citizens, and have our wives and families to think about, and our business and the affairs of the town; and in the next place, even could we leave all these, Master Reuben Hawkshaw would not thank us for our company. Every foot of space is of value on the ship; and men who take up space and consume food, and can neither set a sail nor work a cannon, are but useless encumbrances."

"You have spoken truly, Master Nicholas," Reuben said bluntly. "In the matter of a trip to London, or even as far as the Low Countries, we could accommodate your worshipful honors well enough; but on a journey like this, any man who cannot, if needs be, drink bilge water and eat shoe leather, is best at home. I took a voyage once–it is many years ago, now–to Amsterdam, and the owner, not my good cousin here, but another, took a fancy to go with me; and his wife must needs accompany him, and verily, before that voyage was over, I wished I was dead.

"I was no longer captain of the ship. My owner was my captain, and his wife was his. We were forever putting into port for fresh bread and meat, milk and eggs, for she could eat none other. If the wind got up but ever so little, we had to run into shelter and anchor until the sea was smooth. The manners of the sailors shocked her. She would scream at night when a rat ran across her, and would lose her appetite if a living creature, of which, as usual, the ship was full, fell from a beam onto her platter. I was tempted, more than once, to run the ship on to a rock and make an end of us all.

"No, no: a day's sail out from Plymouth, in a freshly launched ship, on a fine day, with a store of good victuals and a few flasks of good wine, is a right merry business; but farther than that I wish not to see a passenger, on board any ship which I command."

The others laughed.

"Well, Master Diggory, we must be going," Nicholas Turnbull said; "it is getting late. Tomorrow I will come over in the forenoon, as you suggest; and we will go through these lists more carefully, and talk over prices and see what bulk they will occupy, and discuss many other matters with the aid and advice of Master Hawkshaw. There is no occasion for undue haste; and yet, if the thing is to be done, the sooner it be done the better."

As the party went out, Reuben found his son waiting outside the door.

"Well, father?" he asked anxiously, when the three merchants had walked briskly off towards their homes.

"It is all settled, Roger. As soon as everything is prepared, the Swan will sail for the Spanish main."

Roger threw his cap high in the air, with a lusty shout that startled the better passers-by, hurrying towards their homes; for it was now long after dark, and although the town watch patrolled the streets regularly, prudent citizens did not care to be abroad after nightfall.

"You silly boy;" Reuben said; "you have lost your cap."

"Nay, I heard it fall somewhere here," Roger said, searching; "besides, a cap is a small matter, one way or other.

"Ah! Here it is, floating in a pool of mud; however, a bucket of water will set it all right, in the morning.

"O father! I feel wild with joy, only to think that all we have talked over together is going to be true, and that we are to be the first Englishmen who ever saw the beautiful islands they talk about, and the natives with their feathers and strange attire. And–"

"And the Spaniards with their loaded guns, and their dungeons and gibbets," Reuben Hawkshaw put in.

"Not for us, father. The bottom of the sea maybe, but not a Spanish dungeon."

"I hope not, my lad. Still, no man can see the future. However, I am right glad that we are to try this adventure. It is a glorious one, and will bring us honor in the eyes of all Englishmen if we succeed, to say nothing of wealth.

"But mind that you let not your spirits run away with your tongue. No word of this must be spoken to a soul, nor must any mention be made of it in the hearing of my Cousin Mercy, or the girls. The four partners in the adventure have all taken a solemn promise to each other, that they will not breathe a word of it even to their wives, averring that women could never be trusted to keep a secret; though as far as I have seen of them, methinks a woman can keep a bridle on her tongue just as well as a man–and indeed, somewhat better, since they do not loosen them with cider, or wine, or strong waters. But I believe, myself, it was not so much that they doubted whether their wives would keep the secret, as whether they would approve of the enterprise; and that they made the contract together, in order that each might, afterwards, be able to assure his wife that, for his part, he would gladly have taken her into his confidence, but that he was obliged to fall in with the wishes of his partners.

"It is a strange thing, Roger, but methinks that, whereas most men behave valiantly enough when it comes to blows with an enemy, a great proportion are but cowards with their wives."

"But why should they be, father?"

"That is an easy question to ask, Roger, but a difficult one to answer. Maybe you will understand the matter better, some day, when you have taken a wife to yourself. In some matters there is no doubt that women's wits outrun those of men, and that they have a wonderful sharpness of tongue. Now a man, when things go wrong with him, speaks out loudly and roundly; he storms and he rages, but when it is over, there is an end of it. Now a woman is not like that. She seems to ponder the matter over in her heart, and to bring it out as it were piecemeal–throwing little darts at you when you don't expect it; saying little things to which, from their suddenness, you can find no reply; and pricking you furiously all over, until you are ready to roar out with pain and vexation. You see, Roger, a prick hurteth more than a great cut."

"I should not have thought that, father."

"That is because you have not thought the matter over, Roger. In that fight with the Moors many of the men were sorely cut and wounded, but you heard no cry from them; they only set their teeth the harder, and smote more furiously upon their foes; but there was no one of them all but, had he sat down suddenly on a small nail, would have roared out like a bull, and have sworn lustily for a good half hour. So it is in domestic matters: the man rages and storms when things go wrong; and his wife, if she be a woman of judgment, holds her peace until it is over, knowing well enough that he will be at her mercy, afterwards. Then she sets to work, like those gnats that came on board at Genoa, that they call mosquitoes, and startles him with shrill buzzings in his ears, and pricketh him in the tenderest spots she can find; drawing but the smallest speck of blood, but causing an itching that makes him ready to tear his flesh.

"Your mother, Roger, was one of the best of women. She was a good housewife, and an affectionate. I do not know that I ever saw her greatly ruffled in temper, but there were times when I would fly from my house, and not come up from my work on board, until it was time to go straight away to bed, so did she prick and sting me with her tongue; and that not shrilly or with anger, but with little things, let slip as it were unawares, and with an air of ignorance that they in any way applied to me.

"No, Roger, if you will take my advice you will make your ship your mistress. She will have her ways, but you will learn them, and will know just how much helm she requires, and how the sail should be trimmed; but with a woman no man attains to this knowledge, and if you take my advice, you will give them a wide berth.

"I know," he went on, in answer to Roger's merry laugh, "that this is a matter in which no man will trust to other experience than his own. Every man who takes a woman to wife thinks that he can manage her, and goes into the matter with a light heart, as if it were a mere pleasure excursion on which he is embarking; whereas, in truth, it is a voyage as full of dangers and perils as that upon which we are about to adventure.

"Now let us turn back to our lodging, for I have nearly gone on my face four times already, in these deep ruts and holes. I would that the councilors of this town could see the streets of Genoa, or Cadiz, or Amsterdam! They might then try to mend the ways of Plymouth, and make them somewhat less perilous to passengers, after dark."

Work began in earnest upon the following day. A number of shipwrights were set upon the hull of the Swan, which was to be thoroughly overhauled, caulked and pitched, within and without. The masts and rigging were to be carefully looked to, and every defect repaired. A new suit of sails was ordered, the old ones to be patched where the Moorish shot had torn them, so as to be of use as a second suit, did any misadventure happen to the others.

James Standing, the first mate, took charge of these matters; Reuben Hawkshaw assisting Diggory Beggs in all things relating to the stores. Greatly were the provision merchants of the town surprised at the quality of the provisions that Master Beggs ordered for the use of the Swan. Nothing but fine flour of the last year's grinding; freshly killed beef and pork, to be carefully salted down in barrels; and newly baked biscuits would satisfy Reuben Hawkshaw. They could scarce believe that such articles could be meant for use on shipboard; for, as a rule, the very cheapest and worst quality of everything was considered as amply good enough for the use of sailors.

Then, too, the cider and beer must be neither thin nor sour, but sweet and of good body. Surely, Master Beggs must have gone off his head, thus to furnish his ship! For never before had a vessel sailed out of Plymouth harbor, provided after this fashion. An ample store of ropes and cordage, and of all matters required for a ship's equipage, were also laid in. To all questions as to the surprising lavishness of cost, Diggory replied:

"I would have the ship well found in all matters. It was but the other day that the Antelope returned from a voyage to the Levant. She had lost a third of her crew from scurvy, and of the rest but six were strong enough to pull at a rope when she came into port. Did not the women follow Master Skimpole, her owner, through the streets, and cry after him that he was the murderer of their husbands, by reason of the foul victual that he had provided for their use? No, no, it will cost more to start with, but it will be cheaper in the end; for a weak crew often means the losing of a ship, besides the loss of a good name. I have never carried economy to such lengths as did Master Skimpole; but I am resolved, in the future, that those who sail in my ships shall have good and wholesome fare. Then, if misfortune happens, no one will be able to point to me in the streets, and say that I fed my men worse than dogs, and thought only of my profits and nothing of the lives of those who served me."

Indeed Master Diggory, after a short time, quite forgot that all this provision for the health and comfort of the crew was but the outcome of Reuben Hawkshaw's insistence; and came to regard himself, with a feeling of pride, as a man possessed of greater benevolence than his fellow merchants.

A week after the refitting of the Swan was completed she was afloat, with a large proportion of her stores in her hold. A ship from London came round and took up her berth alongside of her, discharging large numbers of bales and cases into her; together with six cannon, in addition to those she before carried, and a large store of ammunition. This naturally gave rise to fresh talk in the town.

"They say that you are fitting the Swan out for a pirate, Master Beggs," one of the merchants said to him; "for twelve cannon are more than a peaceful trader can positively require."

"Yes, if she is to meet with none but peaceful people, neighbor; but if she meets with those who are not peaceful, at all, she needs just as much defense as if she were a ship of war. Master Hawkshaw had much ado to beat off the Moorish pirates who attacked him on his last voyage; and as the present one will be longer, and more dangerous, he has put stress upon me to add much to her armament. She will have valuable cargo on her return voyage, and he has strongly urged upon me to provide such means of defense as may ensure her being able to beat off any who meddle with her; besides, as far as I can read the course of politics, it seems to me that our alliance with Spain is well nigh at an end, and before the Swan is on her return we may be at war with her. This in itself is good reason why I should give my master the means of defending himself stoutly.

"The money spent on the guns is not wasted. They will be none the worse for keeping; and should the Swan, on her next voyage, go into a safer line of trade, I can sell them for as much as they now cost me."

In the meantime, Reuben Hawkshaw had been carefully and quietly picking a crew. He was going to take with him fully twice as many as had, before, sufficed to navigate the Swan. Of the forty men who had sailed with him he had lost nine, and five others had not sufficiently recovered from their wounds to sail with him again. Of the remainder he engaged twenty, all of whom were stout and willing fellows who would, he knew, sail with him wherever he bid them. The remaining six, being given to grumbling, he would have none of, good sailors though they were.

"Half-a-dozen grumblers are enough to spoil a whole crew," he said.

There were, therefore, some sixty new hands to engage. Towards these he found eighteen who had sailed with him on previous voyages, and were glad enough to rejoin him; for he had the name of being a good captain, considerate to his men; one who would be obeyed, but who did not harass his crew, and did all he could, in reason, to make them comfortable.

The others were picked up carefully, one by one. For this purpose he took some of his best men aside, and confided to them, privately, that the present voyage was to be out of the ordinary, and that he needed not only stout fellows but willing and cheerful ones: men who would take hardships without grumbling, and who, with a prospect of good reward in addition to their pay, would go without question where they were told, and do as they were ordered–were it to singe the beard of the Grand Turk, himself, in his own palace. He charged them, therefore, to find for him men of this kind, among their relations, or men who had sailed with him.

"I would rather," he said, "have landsmen, providing they are strong and stout hearted, than sailors, however skillful, who are given to grumbling and disaffection. We shall have plenty of good sailors on board, and the others will soon learn their business; therefore, choose you not for seamanship, but rather for willingness and good temper. And broach not the subject to any unless you feel assured, beforehand, that they will be willing to join; for I want not the matter talked about. Therefore those who join are to keep the matter private, and are not to come on board until the night before we get up our anchors. We are taking a much stronger crew than usual, for we have many guns that need working, if it comes to fighting."

As these instructions were given separately, none of the twelve men he spoke to knew that the others had received similar instructions; and that instead of forty men, as usual, the Swan was to carry nearly ninety.

As to the officers, Reuben Hawkshaw needed none others than those who had before sailed with him. The two mates had each been with him for upwards of ten years, and had learned their business under his eye; and he intended, although he had not as yet told him so, to rate Roger as third mate. His boatswain would go in the same capacity as before; and he shipped, as gunner, one who had served for some years in a king's ship in that rank, and was well acquainted with the working of ordnance.

Mistress Mercy had, of course, heard from her gossips of the talk that was going on, concerning the unusual preparations that were being made, by her husband, for the forthcoming voyage of the Swan; and the trader was often put to his wits' end by her questions on the subject. His professions of benevolence towards the crew, and his explanations of his reasons for her powerful armament had sufficed for others, but they by no means satisfied her.

"Do you think, Diggory Beggs," she asked, indignantly, "that after all these years I do not know you as well as I do the contents of my linen chest? I have never before known you open your purse strings one inch wider than was necessary. Have I not always had to ask, until I am verily ashamed, before I can get a new gown for myself, or a decent cloak for the girls? You have ever been hard fisted with your money, and never disposed to spend a groat, save on good occasion. There is not the wife of a trader of your standing in Plymouth but makes a braver show than I do, when we walk on the hoe on holidays or feast days.

"There is something at the bottom of all this I don't understand; but mark you, Diggory, I am not to be kept in the dark. As your wife, I have a right to know why you are throwing about good and lawful money. I toil and slave to keep your house decent and respectable, at small cost; but I shall do so no longer. If you can afford to throw money into the gutter in one way, you can in another; and people will cry shame on you, when, as they say, you are pampering up your sailors, in such manner as will cause discontent among all others in the port, while your wife and daughters are walking about in homespun!"

Mistress Mercy did not succeed in extracting the information she desired from her husband, who was, however, forced to fall back upon the defense that he had his reasons, but that he was pledged to say nothing concerning them.

"Pledged!" she replied, scornfully. "And to whom are you pledged, I should like to know? I thought you were pledged to me, and that you were bound to cherish and comfort me; which means, of course, that you were to have no secrets from me, and to tell me all that I desire to know."

But though Diggory kept the secret, albeit with much trouble; and with many misgivings as to what would happen in the future, when his wife came to learn of the important venture he had undertaken, without consulting her; she nevertheless succeeded so far that, in order to pacify her, he was obliged to allow her a free hand in choosing, from his magazines, such pieces of cloth and silk for herself and the girls as she had a fancy to. This permission she did not abuse as to quality, for she knew well enough what was becoming, in the way of dress, for the wife of a merchant; and that it was not seemly, for such a one, to attire herself in apparel suited for the wives of nobles, and ladies of the Court. But Diggory groaned in spirit, although he prudently said nothing, at seeing that she took advantage of the present position to carry off a store which would amply suffice, for at least two or three years' wearing, for herself and the girls.

"You have done me a parlous ill turn, Cousin Reuben," he said sadly to his cousin, "by bidding me hide this matter from my wife. A few more such secrets, and I should be a ruined man. Never before have I known her seized with a desire for such prodigality of vesture. I have looked upon her, all these years, as a sober and discreet woman, well content to wear what was quiet and becoming to her station; but now–truly my heart melted when I saw how she fingered the goods, and desired John, my assistant, to cut off such lengths as she desired from some of my goodliest cloths."

"Tut, tut, cousin; you exaggerate things greatly. It is no wonder that Mistress Mercy, seeing that you are flourishing greatly in trade, and able to spend your money freely, should deem it but fitting that she, as your wife, should make a braver show than heretofore. Besides, the girls are growing up, and need to be a little bright and gay. Why, man, there are many London citizens, who could not count their broad pieces with you, whose wives spend many times as much, every year, on their attire as Mistress Mercy has cost you now."

"Well, well, Reuben, there may be something in what you say; but no more secrets, or there is no saying what wild extravagance she might take in her head, next time. She might quarrel with the house and insist upon a new one, furnished from top to bottom; or set her heart on a coach, with running footmen. No, no more secrets, or I shall be having her so set herself up that I shall be no more master of my own house."

Roger was plied with many questions by his cousins, who tried alternately coaxing, and pouting, to learn from him why it was that, as all told them, preparations were being made for the voyage of the Swan such as were unknown, before, at Plymouth. All he could reply was that the ship was only being victualed as all ships ought to be whose owners cared, as they should do, for the comfort and health of their crews. More than that he could not say. He would not deny that he had certain ideas of his own as to the voyage; but if Cousin Diggory and his father thought it well to make no talk about the matter, it was not for him to say what were his thoughts about it.

"But we would tell nobody," Dorothy urged. "Don't you think we could keep a secret, as well as you can?"

"That is just it, Cousin Dorothy! Don't you see, if I were to tell you, it would be a proof that I could not keep a secret? And then, if you told it, I could not blame you for blabbing. I don't say there is any secret; but if there is, I must keep it."

"I know that you are going into danger, Reuben; else you would not have all those great guns they say there are, on board."

"The great guns will keep us out of danger, you see. The more guns, the less danger."

"Come away, Agnes," Dorothy said, with an assumption of stateliness. "Cousin Roger is altogether too smart for us. Let him keep his secrets, if he will; and let us go and help mother with her sewing."

And so, for the last two or three days before the Swan sailed, there was a coolness between Roger and the girls, as well as between Diggory Beggs and his wife.

At last the day came when everything was complete, the water casks filled, and the last packet and bale stored away in the hold; and even Reuben Hawkshaw admitted that there was nothing else that he could think of, requisite either for the safety or navigation of the ship, or the provisioning or health of the crew.

The order was passed round for all the old hands to be aboard before sunset, that evening, together with those who had been openly engaged to fill up the vacancies. As for the rest, the twelve recruiters each received private orders. Three of them were to bring down the men they had engaged to the wharf, abreast of the Swan, at eight o'clock; and to go off in the boat which would be awaiting them there, under charge of Master Standing. Three others were to come half an hour later. The other six were to bring down their men at daybreak–so that all would get on board unnoticed.

The last meal at Master Diggory's was but a dull one. The subject of the Swan and her voyage had, by common consent, been dropped altogether for the last day or two; and it was not until supper was over that Mistress Mercy, and the girls, knew that the hour of sailing was at hand. Then Reuben spoke up:

"We go on board tonight, Cousin Mercy, and shall get up our anchor and loose our sails the first thing in the morning. I know that you have been somewhat aggrieved, at not learning more about our intentions; but it was not Cousin Diggory's fault that you have not been told."

"I do not seek to pry into matters which my husband thinks fit to conceal from me," she said, coldly.

"Nevertheless, cousin, you are hurt; and I cannot blame you, seeing that it is natural that a woman should like to know what is passing around her. But I wish, before I go, that you should see that Diggory is not to blame in this matter. There is no harm in my telling you, now, that he stands not alone in this venture, but that others have joined with him. Now he himself, knowing you to be a circumspect woman, who could be trusted to keep to yourself anything that you might learn, would willingly have taken you into our councils; but all women are not so discreet, and matters which it is very important should be kept secret might have leaked out, had it not been proposed that all concerned in the matter should bind themselves solemnly to each other, to say no words about it, even to their wives; and thus, you see, Diggory's lips have been sealed, and that not by any mistrust of you.

"It may be some time before it will be prudent for the truth about this voyage to be known, but in good time those concerned may think fit to relieve each other of this agreement they have entered upon, and to let their wives, and others who may be depended upon, into the secret. I wanted to tell you this before we sailed, for I should not like to go away feeling that you cherished aught of malice against me; for I have seen for some time that you have held me, as well as your husband, to blame. We are going on a long voyage, Cousin Mercy, and one from which it may well be that none of us will ever return to this good town of Plymouth. I am somewhat breaking my promise in saying this, and I rely upon you, and the girls, repeating it to no one. It is a long and venturous journey, and one not without much peril; but if it succeeds, it will bring much honor, as well as wealth, to all concerned.

"And now, Cousin Mercy, as I have told you so much as that, I trust that we may part as we have always parted, in friendly and kindly fashion. You and your husband have been good friends to me and my boy, and have gone in that matter far beyond the ordinary bounds of kinship; and I should not like to start upon this voyage knowing that there was a cloud between us."

Mistress Mercy rose from her seat, walked round to Reuben Hawkshaw, and kissed him.

"Forgive me, Cousin Reuben," she said, "for my cross looks and shrewish ways. I see that I have acted altogether wrongly in the matter, and that neither you nor Diggory are to blame. I knew not that others were concerned, and thought that a mystery was being made because it was considered that, did I know it, I should run out and blab it in the streets of Plymouth. Now I know how it is, I am well content as to that; but not so, at the thought of this unknown peril into which you are about to run, and I wonder that Diggory should adventure your life, and that of Roger, upon such an expedition."

"It is my own proposal, Cousin Mercy, and Diggory has but yielded to my wishes. Roger is as hot for the adventure as I am, and we are both content to run what risks we may encounter, for the honor which we shall gain if we return safely home.

"And now, Roger, let us be going. Leave takings are sad things, and the shorter they are made, the better."

While these words had been said the girls, who sat on either side of Roger, were silently making their peace with him, by furtive squeezes of his hands below the table; and they burst into tears, as Roger and his father rose.

"Goodbye, Agnes," Roger said.

"Goodbye, Dorothy," and as he kissed her he whispered, "if I return, I will bring you the prettiest trinkets ever seen in Plymouth."

"Bring back yourself, Roger, and I shall be more than content," she replied.

In another minute they were gone, Diggory Beggs taking his hat and starting with them; telling his wife that he should not return until morning, as he should go on board the Swan with them, and remain until she sailed.

"You will not go before daybreak, Cousin Reuben?" Mistress Mercy asked.

"No; it will more likely be an hour after sunrise before we weigh anchor."

"Then I and the girls will be down on the wharf, to see the last of you and wave our kerchiefs, and wish you a pleasant voyage and a safe return."

Chapter 3: The Voyage

Great was the surprise of the original crew of the Swan, when boat load after boat load of fresh hands arrived. They themselves had been quietly told that the voyage was likely to be one of unusual length, and that none save those willing and ready to stay away, as long as might be required, were to sail in the Swan on her present venture. There was, therefore, a general idea current among them that Master Hawkshaw had some adventure quite out of the ordinary in his mind; and the news that some heavy guns had arrived from London for her, had confirmed their opinion as to the voyage.

"Let us have no loud talk, tonight," Reuben Hawkshaw ordered. "When we get our sails spread tomorrow, and are well out of port, you can talk to your hearts' content; but the night is still, and I want not that attention of any on shore should be called to the ship. There has been more foolish talk than enough about her already; so turn in to rest, lads, without ado. The boatswain will serve you each out a pottle of cider, such as you never drank on board ship before, I warrant me, and which is a sample of what you will have, all the voyage. When you have tossed that off, let each lie down as he can find space. We will divide into watches, and settle as to each man's place, tomorrow.

"Pengarvan, set four hands aside to go on shore, with the boat, an hour before daybreak. Tell them off to sleep where you can lay hands upon them, easily. Keep the boat alongside, and make off to the wharf as noiselessly as you can; but I shall be on deck, then, and will give you further orders."

The second mate only replied, "Ay, ay, Captain Hawkshaw," for he was a man of but few words.

Reuben Hawkshaw was not fond of Cornishmen, but he made an exception in the case of Pengarvan–indeed, although their borders joined, there was little liking among Cornish and Devon men for each other.

"They are black, ill-conditioned dogs," Reuben Hawkshaw would say; "good sailors, I own; none better; but glum and surly in their ways, and with nothing joyous in their natures. It seems to me that working in the darkness–in those holes of theirs, underground–has infected the spirits of the whole county; as it might well do, seeing that, as everyone knows, there are little people who guard the treasures of the mines; and who, if they cannot do bodily hurt to those who delve for metals, can yet infect their spirits with a black melancholy, and do them other grievous harm.

"So when Pengarvan came to me as a boy, on the quay here, and asked me to take him with me to sea, I did not much like doing so; for I saw at once, by his speech, that he was Cornish; but I did not like to turn him away, for he said that he was willing, and accustomed to the sea. So I gave him a trial, and he has turned out a first-rate sailor. He is chary of speech, and not given to jest or laughter; but he is always quick, and willing to obey orders; taking whatever comes in good part, and bearing himself just the same, in storm, as in sunshine.

"I know naught of his history. The Swan has been his home since he first came on board, twelve years ago. As long as she is afloat, he never leaves her. When she is laid down for repairs, he takes the nearest lodging on hand, and abides there till she is afloat again. I believe that he comes from Fowey, and guess that he got into some trouble or other, and had to run for it. But that's nothing to me. I want no better man; and know that, whatever comes, I can rely upon Pengarvan to stand by me, and the ship, to the last."

If the men were astonished at the thirty new hands who came on board on the previous evening, they were still more astonished when as many more embarked in the morning. The newcomers were ordered to keep in the forecastle, and in the quarters under it, until the Swan was well away from land.

"There will be a good many eyes turned on the ship, as soon as we are seen to be shaking out our canvas," Reuben said; "and there is no need to set their tongues wagging, by showing more men on deck than we usually carry."

The captain and Diggory Beggs talked late on into the night. They went over all the ground again; and Reuben brought out the map of the islands, and showed where he intended to touch.

"I think not to do much trading there," he said. "There is gold in Hispaniola and Cuba; but the captain I got the chart from said there was no very great store there, and that the natives had but little of it when the Spaniards first arrived; seeing that it took trouble and labor to obtain, and they are by nature altogether averse to hard work, and moreover place but little value on the gold. But there were rumors among them that, farther west, there was a land where gold was in great plenty; and where there was a powerful people, dressed in gay attire, and wearing great bracelets and necklaces of gold.

"So far, the Spaniards have not found this land; though they have sailed down the coast a long way to the south, and northward as far as the point that Master Cabot reached, when he sailed down from Newfoundland; but due west they have never sailed far, and have found the sea ever stretching away in front of them; so that it is clear that either the great mainland is split in two at this point, or there is a vast bay. This I shall try to discover, and if we find these people of whom the Indians speak, we may well return loaded down with gold.

"My advice to you, Cousin Diggory, is that you and your partners should continue to keep silent as to this voyage of ours. If we come not back, and after a time there is a talk here that we have gone to the Indies, the news may be carried to London; and you may be questioned, and may be blamed mightily for undertaking such an adventure, without the king's permission; and all sorts of harm may fall upon you. Success would, in my mind, altogether excuse you; and you will be able to offer so great a present to the king that he will be mighty contented. But if you fail, it will be otherwise. Therefore my advice is, till the Swan is anchored in the port say nothing about her. It were best, from the moment we sail, to write off all that has been spent upon her as money lost, just the same as if you knew for certain that she had gone down as soon as she was out of sight of land.

"Folks will ask you what has become of her, and you will truly say that you have had no news; and when months pass on, and she comes not, you will shake your head, and say that you begin to fear that evil has befallen her. She may have gone down in a storm, or been cast on some rocky coast and all perished, or been captured by pirates.

"If the friends of the sailors make a stir, and go to the magistrates, you have but to show the copy of the letter of instructions which we drew up the other day, laying it down that I was to make for the African Straits, and to put into no Portuguese or Spanish port by the way; that I was then to shape my course for the island of Malta, and to take in fresh stores of food and water there; then that I was to pass round the southernmost point of Greece, and sail upwards to Constantinople, and there to dispose of such portion of my cargo as I could sell at good profit, buying goods suited for our market with the monies I received; and if my hold was full I was then to return straight to England; but if I had still some of my cargo unsold, I could trade as best seemed to me among the Eastern Islands, and with the ports of Asia.

"There would be your instructions to show, and as it is notorious to all that you provisioned the ship in the best manner possible, and laid in greater stores than ordinary of all things necessary for the voyage, none can hold you to blame, in any way, if the chances of the seas have proved too masterful for us, and the Swan returns no more.

"Should we carry out our enterprise to the fullest, and gain great store of gold, I shall, if it is possible, come not directly home, but to some port–maybe in Ireland, maybe in the Low Countries–whence we can send word to you. Upon hearing of our coming there, I should advise you and your fellow adventurers to journey straight to London, to gain audience with one of the ministers, and tell him you have a matter of great importance to communicate to the king himself; and that you should then lay before his majesty an account of what you have done, and pray him to pardon your boldness, which was due to your desire for the honor of the country as much as to wish for profit, and beg him to accept such share of the gold as you may think fit. I shall, of course, when I write let you know about what weight of the metal I have on board. In that way, when the ship comes into port all will be smooth sailing for you; whereas if I come unannounced, there is no saying what share of your profits his majesty may think fit to take."

"I think the plan is a very good one, indeed, Reuben; and I will follow it to the letter. When think you may I begin to expect to hear news of you?"

"It is difficult to say, seeing that we know neither the distance we may have to sail, nor the difficulties we may have to meet with, nor the winds and currents of those regions. I should say fifteen months at the earliest; and if double that time passes, without your hearing aught, then I should say you may give up all hope of ever seeing us again."

"I am disposed even now, Reuben, to regret that I ever embarked in this venture–not, as you surely know, from any fear of losing the money that I have put into it, but from the risk that will be run by you and the lad Roger, who are both very dear to me."

"Whatever comes, you must not blame yourself in that matter, Diggory. You have only yielded to my solicitations, and if we go to our death it is our choosing, and none of thine."

"Should the Swan come back without you, Reuben–as may possibly be, for if there be any danger you are sure to expose yourself in the front of it–Roger shall be as a son to me; and shall either in time have a ship to command, and a share in her, as thou hast; and he shall come in our business, when he has had enough of adventure at sea, and is willing to settle down on land."

Reuben wrung his cousin's hand silently, and then said:

"Let us take one more glass of strong water, Diggory, and then get a few hours' sleep before morning. It is past midnight now, and I must be up by four; for at that hour the boat must go off for the first batch of our new hands."

Day broke, just as the last batch of men were brought on board. As soon as these had gone below the whistle was sounded, the old crew came up on deck, and the preparations for making sail commenced. The anchor was hove short, the lashings of the sails were loosened, the flags run up to the mast heads, the last casks and bales lowered into the hold, the hatches put on, and the decks washed down.

Before these preparations were all complete, a little group was seen, standing at the end of the wharf.

"There is your good wife, Diggory, and the girls. She has kept her word to be up, betimes, to see the last of us."

At last all was ready, and Diggory shook hands with Reuben, and turned to Roger, when the captain said:

"The lad can go in charge of the boat that takes you ashore, Diggory, and just say another word of parting to them there."

In five minutes, Roger stood on the wharf.

"I cannot wait, Cousin Mercy," he said, "for all is ready for hoisting the anchor; but my father said I might just come ashore, for one more goodbye."

"May God protect you, Roger," Mistress Mercy said, as she folded him in a motherly embrace. "We shall all pray for you, daily and nightly, until you return. Goodbye, Roger! Don't imperil your life needlessly, but be prudent and careful."

"For your sake, Dorothy," he whispered, as he kissed her.

"Yes, for my sake, Roger," she said softly.

Agnes hung round his neck, crying loudly, and her mother had to unclasp the child's fingers.

"God bless you all," said Roger hoarsely, and then ran down the steps, and leaped into the stern of the boat.

When he gained the deck of the Swan, the boat was hoisted in, and the men began to heave round the windlass. As soon as the anchor was up, the sails were sheeted home; and the Swan, yielding to the light breeze off the land, began to make her way through the water. Roger, from the poop, waved his cap in reply to the signals of farewell from shore; and then, running down into the waist, busied himself with the work of the ship, until they were too far away from the land for the figures there to be any longer visible.

The rest of the crew now came on deck, and all were mustered in watches. Reuben Hawkshaw, standing on the edge of the poop, then said a few words to them.

"Men," he said, "I dare say there is some wonderment among you, in finding yourselves so strong a crew, and at seeing the Swan so well provided with guns, and with all other necessaries. You will learn, in good time, all about it; but at present it is best, for many reasons, that you should know nothing about the matter. We may be overhauled by a king's ship; we may meet with foul weather, and have to put back into port; and a loose tongue might do us grievous damage. It is enough for you to know that where the ship is going you are going; that she is stored with provisions of such quality as was never put on board a trader before; that everything will be done for your comfort. As to myself, I am content to know that I have a crew of eighty-five stout Devonshire lads under me, and that we can give an account of ourselves, whosoever may meet us. Those who have sailed with me before know that I do my best for my men, that there will be no harsh words or violence on board this ship, save they are well merited. Discipline, order, and obedience I will have, and that strictly. Above all, I will have no grumbling. A grumbling crew is a useless crew, and a sick crew; while a cheerful crew can meet, with confidence, whatever befalls them; but I think not that I have any grumblers on board, since every man has been carefully chosen. A merry heart goes all the way, as the saying has it, and I want this crew to be a happy one.

"So far as the order of the ship permits it, you shall have every indulgence. At first you will find yourselves pressed for space, but you will soon eat and drink room for yourselves. The stores to be first used are all down in the fore hold, and I reckon that, in three weeks or a month, that will be cleared; and there will then be room for all to lie in shelter, when we are in harbor; and the present accommodation is sufficient for the watch below, providing all sleep quietly, and have good conscience.

"And now, to work. While you get everything tidy and in good shipshape, the cooks will get to work at the coppers; and I can promise you a good breakfast, washed down by sound cider, such as you had last night."

The men gave a cheer, and were soon at work, under the direction of their officers. It mattered little to them where they were going, or what was before them. They had guessed that it was no ordinary voyage they were going to undertake; but the thought that, wherever it was, they were to be well kept and well cared for, satisfied them mightily; and if fighting were to come into their way, so much the better. With such a crew, they could well take their part against any enemy they were likely to meet.

In the poop of the Swan there was a small saloon, extending across the stern, and two cabins on either side of the passage leading to it. These were occupied by the captain, the two mates, and Roger; and they took their meals together in the saloon. In a cabin underneath this, the three petty officers and twenty of the sailors lived together, the main body of the crew occupying the raised forecastle and the cabin underneath it. The galley was forward, built up against the forecastle, and thus sheltered from heavy seas which might sweep the waist of the vessel. Four small cannon were mounted on the poop, two on the forecastle, the six larger guns were in the waist–three on either side.

The breeze freshened as the Swan drew out from under the shelter of the land, and by midday the shore had faded from the sight. The crew had by this time settled down in their places, and sat in groups on deck, some overhauling the contents of their sea bags, looking over their clothes, and setting to, with needle and thread, to make such repairs as were needed. Some of the new hands were leaning over the side, wishing heartily that they were on shore again. Those who had made voyages were talking to their companions about the various ports at which they might touch, and the sights they would behold.

All, save those suffering from the effects of the sea, were in high good temper. As much fresh beef as was like to keep good till eaten had been brought on board. The wind set in, the next morning, freshly from the northeast; and with all sail set, the Swan ran gaily before it.

"Would that this wind would blow, without a break, for another month," Reuben Hawkshaw said, as he sat at dinner with the two mates and Roger.

Standing and Pengarvan looked up quickly; but the latter, without a question, again betook himself to feeding. Standing, however, laid down his jackknife in astonishment.

"A month, Captain Hawkshaw? I should have thought four or five days of this would give us ample westing, and that after that a westerly breeze, somewhat from the north, would suit us best."

"Ay, ay, you would think so, Standing; but then you see, you know not to within a good many points where our journey tendeth. Wait till I have finished my dinner, for man cannot talk and eat together, with comfort. Then, when my boy has removed the trenchers, I will tell you, over an extra mug of cider, what all this is about."

The meal lasted for some time longer, for Reuben Hawkshaw was a good trencherman, and one not given to hurrying himself, unless there was need; and neither of the other men were far behind their chief, in the matter of the stowage of victuals. But at last the meal was done, and the trenchers were carried off. The earthenware mugs were again filled with cider, and then Reuben Hawkshaw–sitting at one end of the table, with Roger facing him, and the mates one on either hand–threw himself back in his settle, which he used in right of captaincy, while the others contented themselves with stools, and began.

"I had not thought, comrades, to broach this matter until we were down in the latitude of the African Straits; but seeing that the wind has taken us in charge, I see no reason for longer keeping silent. You, who have both sailed with me for years, must have known right well that this was no ordinary voyage–the number of men I have taken on board, the care I have had as to the stores, and the great number of water casks, must have told you that. You have asked no questions, and I did not expect that you would."

"Why should we?" James Standing growled. "It mattered naught to us where we went, as we knew we should hear, in good time."

Pengarvan said nothing, but he nodded, to show that he agreed with the first mate.

"Well, men, our intent is this: I see not why the Spaniards should have all the good things to themselves, and I purpose to go a-trading with the natives, down in these new islands of theirs."

An exclamation of surprise broke from James Standing, but Pengarvan only nodded again.

"But this is not all," Reuben went on. "So far, the Spaniards have not gained much store of gold from these islands; but I have learned that, among the natives, there is talk of a rich nation lying somewhere farther to the west, where gold and riches of all sorts abound. So far the Spaniards have not found it, having their hands pretty well full. They have sailed down the land to the south and, as you know, Master Cabot sailed from the north, down almost to the latitude of these islands; but due west no man has sailed yet, or if he has, has never returned to tell of it."

"Well, Captain Reuben," James Standing said, "as I said before, it makes no difference to me where we go. If the Spaniards catch us there, they will cut our throats to a surety, if they can; but if you are ready to take your chance of that, I have nothing against it. I feel as if I am taken aback a bit, just now, as it comes new to me–my own fancy being that you intended to trade with the Turkish ports and islands, and had taken a strong crew on board to beat off any pirates that they might meet."

"And you, Pengarvan?"

"It is as I expected, Captain. I thought that you did not bring the Spaniard on board at Cadiz, and sit plying him with wine, and talking to him by the hour, for nothing. So when I saw what was being done on board the Swan, it came to me that you intended to try a venture in the Spanish main."

"Here is a map which I got from the Spaniard," Reuben said, laying it out upon the table. "Here, you see, all the great islands are marked in their places, with their ports and the Spanish settlements. There are besides these, the Spaniard said, numbers of small ones not marked on the chart. In these large islands, Cuba and Hispaniola, the Spaniards have made themselves masters of the people, and reduced them to slavery; and there would be no touching at these with either safety or profit. The small ones have been only occasionally visited, and with these we may do trade.

"Here is the line of the mainland, to the south of the islands. You see it runs along as far as the easternmost of them, and then turns away to the south; while from the north the mainland comes down well nigh to Cuba. One reason, the Spaniard said, why they have not sailed west to find out this land of gold, is that there is a great current, which runs in between the islands and the southern land, and sweeps out again with great force between the Bahamas and this northern land; and that they fear being swept away by it, and getting driven into whirlpools; and moreover they say that there are great storms to be encountered, in the waters to the west.

"Now the fact that there is a current into, and another current out of, this western sea, seems to show that there is no exit to the west; and that the water that comes in at the south finds itself in a great bay, and so is forced to pass out to the north. How great this bay may be I know not, but surely it cannot be too great to search. At any rate it is clear to me that, somewhere to the west, these two great lands that we see to the north and south join. Now that men who have, with much toil and risk, made a discovery of a new land should claim it, for their king, seems to me fair and right; but not that they should claim sole traffic, with lands of whose very existence they know nothing; and therefore, although it is true that the pope has given these western islands to Spain, I see not how he can give to them land not, as yet, discovered.

"If there is, as the natives in the islands say, a land lying somewhere to the west, where gold is abundant, I see no reason why, if we are first there, we should not gather great stores. The bales and boxes, that were brought round from London, contain a great quantity of all the things that are, as the Spaniard told me, most prized by the natives. Glass beads of all sorts and kinds, vessels of brass, iron hatchets and arrowheads, hawk bells, mirrors, and trinkets. The venture is, I admit, a perilous one; but if we succeed, every man on board will have a share in the profit."

Reuben then explained the arrangements he had made, with the owners, for the division of such treasure as they might bring home.

"That is a fair proposal," the first mate said; "and I doubt not that all on board will gladly fall in with it. If we succeed, we shall set every tongue in England wagging; and there will be plenty of others, I warrant, who will be ready to follow our example."

"I had intended," Reuben went on, "to sail as far as the straits; then to head for the island of Madeira and, when within sight of it, to head away west-sou'-west. But if we carry this wind with us, we will make straight for the islands, and thereby shall escape the risk of being seen by vessels coming and going, as they all follow a track south of Madeira. We can make a good fight with any Spaniard that falls foul of us, and are as likely to take him as he is to capture us; but I would fain keep clear of them, if I can, since we go to trade and not to fight.

"Now I think you had best give a hint of the matter in hand to our old crew, all of whom we can depend upon; as indeed, I hope we can upon all, though as yet their mettle has not been tried. Take them aside singly, and open the matter to them. In a few days I shall tell the rest; but the matter will go more fairly, and easily, if we have a proportion of them ready to throw up their caps, and shout."

"Aye, aye, Captain Reuben. One bellwether will carry a whole flock after it, but I fear not that any will want to hold back. It is just the adventure that will suit a brave man's spirit–plenty to see, plenty to do, the chance of a fight, and the chance of a fortune. I should like to know what one could want, better than that. Besides, all are in high feather at the quality of the food, which they say the like of was never known on shipboard before; and that goes a long way. It is the fasting man who kicks. The full one is content, however matters go."

Pengarvan had not again opened his lips. He nodded occasionally, and that was all his captain expected of him; but the fact that he had guessed the destination of the ship, added to the esteem which Reuben Hawkshaw had for his second mate.

Three days later Reuben Hawkshaw called the crew together, and informed them of their destination. He possessed the rough eloquence best suited for the class he was addressing, and carried his hearers with him. He spoke as if the idea, that any of them could shrink from undertaking such an adventure, had not entered his mind; but assumed that they were the most fortunate of men, in having such a chance offered to them.

"You do not yet know," he said, "how great a piece of good fortune has befallen you, by being chosen to sail with me on this voyage. Had the news been as much as whispered, in Plymouth, I could have gathered a thousand volunteers in an hour. You all know how careful have been the preparations for the voyage, how strongly we are manned, how well we are armed, what stores of excellent provisions and what casks of good cider and ale are in the hold.

"Now I am going to tell you what all this is for. We are going, lads, to get gold; and if we succeed, as I doubt not we shall, each man on his return will, in addition to his wages, have a share in the spoil–such a share as will, I hope, make him comfortable for life."

A loud cheer broke from the men, as they pressed forward eagerly to listen.

"I have learned, lads," he said, "from a Spaniard who has been out there, of a land abounding with gold, lying to the west of the Spanish Islands. As yet, none of them have ventured thither; and I mean that we shall be the first to reap the harvest. Why should these Spaniards keep every good thing to themselves? We are as good sailors as they are, and better; as good men, and better. Therefore, I say, we will have a share of the prizes.

"We shall touch on our way at some of the islands, for wood and water and fruit and vegetables. There are plenty of them where we can find these, without meeting with a Spaniard. If we do meet with one, and he tries to interfere with us, so much the worse for him.

"Then, when we have taken in what we want, we will sail west; and if we find this land, as I doubt not we shall, we will return home with such treasures as were never brought before into an English port.

"You must make up your minds, lads, that it is not to be all plain sailing, and that we may have hardships and trials to meet with; but no true sailor shrinks from these. It is a grand adventure, lads–an adventure that nobles and princes would be glad to share in. There is honor and glory in it, as well as booty. We shall be the first Englishmen who ever sailed those seas, or dared to dispute the right of the Spaniards to keep all the treasures of the west in their hands; and in time to come your children's children will be proud to say, 'My grandsire was one of those who sailed in the Swan.'"

When the captain ceased speaking, there was a shout of enthusiasm from his hearers; not one of whom but considered himself to be one of the most fortunate of men, in being chosen as one of the crew of the Swan. This was an adventure, indeed. It was no mere trading voyage, but a grand expedition. There were new lands to be seen, there was the satisfaction of outwitting the Spaniards, there were glory and honor and gold to be obtained.

As for hardships and danger, they recked little of them. These always formed part of their lot; and with so well found a ship, and so good a crew, they felt confident of being able to face anything that might befall them.

They speedily broke up into excited groups, eagerly discussing the news they had heard. The new hands plied the older ones with questions, as to the general strength of the Spanish ships, the number of men they carried, and their armament. The guns were examined with fresh attention and admiration, and men looked along the sights as if already, in fancy, engaging in an encounter with the Dons. A horn of strong ale was served out to each, by the captain's orders, to celebrate the occasion; and the men drank success to the enterprise, shaking each other by the hand, and each vowing to do his share, bravely.

The wind continued favorable until they had passed Madeira, which was seen like a cloud on the port side. Three days later the breeze dropped, and there was a stark calm, in which the Swan lay motionless on the sea for well nigh a fortnight. The captain, knowing well that idleness is, of all things, the most harmful to a crew, set them to work to get up the cases of arms, and polish their swords and pikes until they shone. Then the crew were exercised with boarding pike and cutlass. Singlesticks and staffs, which the captain had provided for such an occasion, were brought up; and men were matched against each other with these–small prizes being given to those who showed themselves the most proficient.

Squads were told off to the great guns, and instructed how these should best be worked by the gunner, so that each man should do his share without hurry or confusion. He would fain have practiced them at a mark, but this the captain would not have as, with the air so still, the guns would be heard at a long distance, and might even bring up some Spanish or Portuguese vessel, to inquire into the cause of the firing–for they were now far below the line which the ships of other nations were forbidden to cross. Nor was there great need for practice, for to each gun was appointed, as captain, one of the old hands accustomed to the work, who could be trusted to send the ball straight when the time should come.

With these and other exercises, and with such sports as the sailors could devise, the time of the calm was got through well enough. They had now been over a month at sea; but, thanks to the honest food and sound cider, the men's health in no way suffered, and all were as well and hearty as upon the day when they set sail.

When the wind came, it came with sudden fury; but Reuben Hawkshaw had heard of the sudden gales that ships sailing west had to encounter, and took precautions as soon as it began to rise–furling up all the great sails; passing lifelines along the sides, to which the men could cling, if the waves washed boisterously over her; and clearing the decks and closing up all hatchways and openings. So, though for a week she tossed and labored in the gale, she was none the worse when it ceased; and indeed, the seas she encountered were by no means so heavy as those with which she had battled, on her voyage home from Spain.

While the gale lasted, Reuben Hawkshaw took every precaution to enable him to keep his reckoning, heaving the log every half hour, and noting constantly each change in the direction of the wind; so that, when all was over, he could tell within fifty miles the spot where the gale left her–for in those days the instruments of navigation were in their infancy, and sailors relied chiefly on the compass, and dead reckoning, to bring them safe to port, however long their voyage might be. Reuben Hawkshaw knew of no other plan, but as far as these went he was an excellent navigator, and was seldom many miles out in making a landfall.

As soon as the gale abated, sail was again made on the ship, and she proceeded on her course. In another three weeks, the mates were seen frequently to ascend into the tops, and the news spread among the crew that the Spanish islands lay not far ahead. The justness of the captain's reckoning was soon proved; for at daybreak, one morning, land was perceived directly ahead; though still lying, like a patch of low cloud, on the horizon.

A cheer broke from those on deck, as soon as the mate proclaimed that to a certainty it was land they saw, and the watch below came pouring up. Another cheer saluted the captain as he came out from his cabin–a tribute to his seamanship, in thus bringing them straight across the ocean, on a path that no Englishman had ever before sailed.

He, with the two mates, at once ascended to the fore top. From here, as the morning brightened, two other points of land could be seen, far away on either hand.

"We are evidently approaching small islands. This is just what we hoped. My fear was that we might strike Hispaniola, or Porto Rico. When we get nearer land we will lower our topsails, so as not to be so easily made out from the land. Now we will go below, and try and mark off our place on the chart."

Chapter 4: Among The Islands

"Now, let us go through our calculations again," the captain said when they entered his cabin.

"How long will you be, Captain?" the first mate asked.

"Half an hour, Standing."

"Then I will come again or, if you want me before that, send for me," and the first mate went out on deck again, for though well skilled to handle a ship in all weathers, and as brave and hardy a seaman as sailed out of Plymouth, James Standing could neither read nor write; and though in a rough sort of way he could reckon the course a ship should lie, and make allowance for leeway and currents and baffling winds, and could bring a ship into any port in England or the Low Countries, he was of no use in a matter of this kind.

Pengarvan was a good scholar, and Reuben had taught him what he knew of navigation, and always made him keep a log from the time when he first became a mate; at first comparing their calculations every day, and then but once a week; arguing over the allowances each had made for tide and leeway; and sometimes finding to his surprise, on arriving in port, that Pengarvan's calculations were even nearer to the truth than his own.

This was a great satisfaction to him, for he felt that, if aught should happen to himself when on a voyage, Pengarvan could be trusted to bring the Swan home, as safely and surely as he could himself. Roger had, for the last two years, been going through the same schooling; but as yet he was very far from attaining accuracy, being unwilling to make sufficient allowance for the great leeway that a vessel, in those days, made with the wind abeam.

"Now, Pengarvan," Reuben said in great glee, "bring out your log book. We have not compared notes since we started, for till we expected to reach land there was no occasion to do so, as our general course was clear enough. Now let us see where you put her.

"And you, too, Roger; let us see what hand you have made of it.

"I went through my calculations yesterday, and I am sure that there is no mistake in the figures. If I am right, this is the island that we see ahead, the one called Samona; while that we see dimly away on the port hand is Mariguana. I don't see, by this map, any land marked that could be that which we see on the starboard hand.

"Now, what do you make of it?"

"I put it more than a degree to the southeast, Captain; and believe that the three islands we see are those marked as the Caicos: the Great Caicos in the center, North and East on either hand."

"And you, Roger, what do you make of it?"

"According to my calculation, father, we ought to be full two hundred miles from land, and heading straight for Abaco, the northernmost of these islands."

The captain laughed, and even Pengarvan smiled.

"I fear, Roger, it would be hardly safe to leave the ship in your hands, at present. You are some six hundred miles away from Pengarvan's islands, and but seventy less from mine.

"Well, Pengarvan, whether you or I be right, we may congratulate ourselves; for we have made a near cast, indeed, seeing that it is eight weeks since we left England, and more than six since we sailed out of sight of Madeira; and that we traversed a sea altogether strange to us, and of whose currents we know nothing. We are both right, to a day, in our reckoning of distance; and neither of us need feel hurt, if the other turns out right, at finding himself but sixty miles out, on a voyage of such length as this.

"I headed for this point because, as I said, we must steer clear of the great islands; which are, as you know, wholly in the possession of the Spaniards, who have dispossessed the inhabitants, and use them as slaves for working the plantations and mines. As you see by the chart, they have no posts in all these islands, running from here northwest, nearly up to the mainland; except a small post at

San Salvador. Now we will coast up through these islands, till we get within sight of Columbus Point, at the southerly end of San Salvador; for that was the island, you know, that was first discovered by him in '92. Then we will strike westward to Andros, and after that shape her course due west. This will take us north of the west end of Cuba, and well out of sight of land; but we must be careful of our navigation, for as you see it is written here:

"'Small islands, innumerable, scattered among those marked here; these being the principal. Many of these islands are low, and show but little above the water. Sailing is very perilous, and not to be attempted at night.'

"You see, in this course we shall have the advantage of being well out of the ordinary line of passage of the Spaniards, who shape their course more to the southward, make Porto Rico their first landfall, and then have the two great islands, Hispaniola and Cuba, lying straight before them; free, as it seems, by the chart, from any dangers to navigation.

"Roger, from this evening we will compare our log books day by day, so that you may learn where it is that you have gone wrong. But I can guess how it is. The wind is blowing chiefly from the east, and you will never make allowance enough for drift; and I have told you over and over again that, with a light wind on our beam, we drive a mile to leeward for every two we go on our course. There are many ships which will drift nigh a mile for every mile they sail, in light winds. When the wind is brisk, and we are going fast through the water, then we drift but little, not more perhaps than one mile to six or seven."

"But why is that, father? How is it that a light wind blows us away sideways; and that a strong wind, instead of blowing us more, blows us less?"

"That I cannot tell you, Roger. You must leave those questions for wiser heads to settle. I only know that it is so–of that there is no doubt at all; but why, I have not the least idea.

"How does it strike you, Pengarvan?"

The Cornishman shook his head.

"I have thought it over, Captain, many times. It seems to me, sometimes, that I have a sort of notion why it is; but it is not clear, even to myself. I could not put it into words."

The first mate now looked into the cabin.

"Here we are, James. Pengarvan puts her here, opposite these three little islands. I put her here some sixty miles away."

"It matters not at all, that I can see, which it is," Standing said. "One island is as good as another, so that it has got water and fruit. The tubs are getting low, and the men are beginning to need a change of diet; so I hope, Captain, you will lay her to at the first we come to, and get what we want, whether it is Spaniard or native we have to fight for it."

"I hope we shall have to fight neither, Standing; but I don't think we are likely to meet with Spaniards–for all the islands in these groups are small ones, and the navigation dangerous. As for the Indians, I fear we may not find them very friendly, seeing that they will, of course, take us for Spaniards, whom they have little reason to love. Still, when they see that our intentions are peaceable, and that we wish only to trade, they may abate their hostility."

In three hours they were close to the island that they had first seen, which proved to be much nearer than they had supposed, at first sight. It was low, and thickly covered with trees, and of only a few miles' circumference.

"There is no chance of finding the natives hostile here," Reuben Hawkshaw said. "Their numbers can be but scanty, and the only fear is that they may hide themselves in the woods at our approach, and refuse to have dealing with us.

"Get the lead ready to sound, James, and put some grease on the bottom, that we may see what kind of holding ground it is."

As the sun had risen the wind had fallen, and the Swan was now moving very slowly through the water. They were about a mile from the land when the log was first hove.

"Eighteen fathoms, Captain," the mate reported, adding when the lead was hauled up, "and a sandy bottom."

Casting the lead regularly, they sailed on until within little more than a quarter of a mile of the shore, and there dropped anchor in six fathoms of water.

"I shouldn't like to be caught in a gale here," the captain said; "but if it did come on to blow, we could get up our anchor and sail round to the other side of the island, where we should be in shelter."

"There are some natives, father," Roger, who was watching the shore, exclaimed. "They are waving green branches."

"Wave a white flag, Roger. Fasten anything white to a boat hook, and wave it. They may understand that, as the white flag is in use by all nations as a sign of peace, and they may have seen the Spaniards use it.

"Get one of the boats lowered, James–the long boat will be the best–let its crew take their arms with them, but lay them under the seats, so as to land in peaceable guise. I myself will go ashore in her, and see what are the intentions of the natives. Get a couple of guns loaded, and if you see they attack us, fire a shot over their heads into the woods. That will be enough to frighten them. However, I think not that we shall have trouble."

A couple of boxes had already been got on deck by the captain's orders, and some strings of glass beads, hawk bells, and other articles of trade taken out.

"You can come with me, Roger," the captain said; and in a few minutes the boat rowed towards the shore.

Eight men sat at the oars, and eight others were bestowed in the bow and stern. She would have carried twice as many, but the captain wished to avoid any show of force.

The group of natives had increased, by the time the boat reached the shore; and the captain saw that they consisted of two men who were apparently chiefs, and some thirty of inferior rank. They continued to wave green branches, and their attitude was so peaceful that the captain did not hesitate to leap ashore, as soon as the boat touched the strand.

"You follow me, Roger; and you others keep your hands on your arms, ready to use them. But sit quiet, and do not show your weapons unless there be occasion."

The chiefs advanced with a timid air towards the newcomers; and, on approaching, saluted in an attitude of deep humility, using the Spanish word Amigos.

"Amigos–Friends," repeated the captain, in a cheerful tone.

Roger gazed with intense interest upon these strange beings. They were, in color, but little darker than the Moors who had tried to capture the Swan, on her last voyage. They were of good height, but of slender figure. Their countenances were soft and almost feminine, with large dark eyes and mild and gentle expression. They had no hair upon their faces; that on their heads was long and black. Round their heads were light gold bands, from which rose plumes of colored feathers. They were naked above the waist, save that over one shoulder cotton cloths, ornamented with fantastic patterns wrought in bright feathers, were lightly thrown.

From the waist they wore cotton petticoats, reaching to the knees. Both had belts decorated by shells, worked into intricate patterns; and from similar belts, crossing the shoulder, hung quivers filled with small arrows. They had necklaces and bracelets of bright beads, of European manufacture; and both carried light spears, their bows hanging from their shoulders.

Their followers were similarly dressed, save that the fillets round their heads, instead of being gold, were strips of skin decorated with shells and beads, and the mantles were of plain cotton.

The captain took from his pouch two necklaces of large blue beads, and presented them to the chiefs, and also gave to each of them a small hatchet. These they received with tokens of gratitude; being specially pleased with the hatchets, which were articles vastly prized by the natives, and rarely bestowed upon them by the Spaniards, who were very chary of presenting the natives with anything that could be used as a weapon.

The captain then made a sign to the natives to approach, and bestowed a necklace of smaller beads upon each. He next called to the sailors, and bade them come ashore, bringing with them only their hangers; for there was no doubt that the natives were friendly.

While they were doing so, four of the natives, at the order of their chiefs, brought forward large baskets; beautifully plaited and, as Roger judged, made of the tender bark of some tree. The chiefs took these from their attendants and, opening them, placed them before the captain with a gesture of humility. They were filled with fruits, all of which were of kinds such as neither Roger, nor his father, had seen before.

The sailors now brought forward an empty barrel, and the captain signified that they required water. One or two billets of wood were also shown, and the captain signified, by action, that he wished his men should be allowed to cut wood, to carry on board ship. He also pointed to the baskets of fruit, and then showed some more strings of beads, and some hawk bells, intimating his desire to trade.

The natives readily comprehended the gestures. Pointing to the keg, they intimated, by signs, that the ship should be moved round to the other side of the island; and that fruit would be taken to them there.

The men would, gladly enough, have wandered at once into the woods to look at the trees and flowers, which differed widely from anything they had ever before seen; but the captain said:

"We shall have time enough for that, men. Let us get off with this fruit. Our comrades on board will be thirsting for their share. Then we will get the ship round on the other side; and all will have an opportunity to go ashore."

As soon as they got on board, a portion of the fruit was set aside, for the use of the officers, and the rest divided among the crew. Although they were ignorant of the names, the men enjoyed hugely the pineapples, guavas, and custard apples that formed the major portion of the contents of the baskets; and cheerfully set about the work of getting up their anchor, and setting the sails.

But the wind had now entirely dropped, and the Swan scarce moved through the water. So anxious, however, were the men to land, that they gladly obeyed the captain's orders to get out all the boats and tow her–although the heat was so great that, at any other time, they would have shrunk from such a labor.

As soon as they reached the other side of the island, the anchor was dropped and, the men on board having already made everything snug, Captain Reuben called those who had been towing out of the boats.

"My lads," he said, "I wish to say a few words, before you land. In the first place, you cannot all go. It would never do to leave the ship without sufficient hands on board to fight her, seeing that at any moment a Spaniard may come round one end of the island or the other, and fall upon us. Consequently, half must remain on board, and take their turn on shore tomorrow. I wish to give no advantage to any; therefore the boatswain shall put two pieces of folded paper in his hat, one being blank and the other having a cross upon it. If the blank paper is drawn, the starboard watch shall go ashore, and the larboard take their turn tomorrow. If the paper with the cross comes out, it will be the other way.

"One more matter: I shall expect the discipline on shore to be as good as it has been on board ship. The natives are to be treated well, and all that we get from them shall be by fair barter, and it shall be conducted for the advantage of all. The first mate and boatswain will take ashore some of the goods we have brought for the purpose of trade, and they will buy not only such things as we require for the ship–fruit and vegetables–but whatever the natives may have to sell.

"All these things will be brought on board, and then those of you who wish for any of these articles, as a token from the first island at which we touched, can take them; making an auction among yourselves, the sums to be deducted from your wages. In this way all will be on a fair footing, and the proceeds of the sale will go into the general fund, to be divided at the end of the voyage. Nevertheless, I should advise you not to purchase now, but to leave it until we have finished all our business, and are on our homeward way. Then we shall see what we have obtained, and each man can buy according to his liking. I say this because, if you get things now, they will litter up the ship, and will get broken, lost, or thrown overboard; and it were far better that everything remained packed in the hold, until we are on the homeward voyage.

"Another thing: Let each man behave himself decently on shore. Be gentle and kind to the natives who, though but heathens, are a harmless people, and friendly. Let there be no quarrels or disputes; and above all, let none meddle with the women. I warn you that any breach of these orders will be most severely punished; and that, moreover, anyone who does so offend will never have leave to go ashore again, not if we cruise for ten years among these islands."

The second mate and Roger remained on board with the starboard watch, the drawing giving the advantage to the others; and these, with the captain and first mate, were soon rowing towards the shore. Those on board, although disappointed that fate had decided against them, had their share of amusement, for a good many canoes afterwards came off to them, filled with goods for barter; and as the captain, before leaving, had told the second mate that he could buy and sell with those who came out, a brisk trade was soon established.

They had no fear of treachery from the natives, who were in such dread of the white men that they would not venture to lift a hand against them, however great the odds might be; and they were, therefore, allowed to come on board and mix freely with the sailors. The contents of the canoes, chiefly fruit and vegetables, were spread out on the deck, and the mate and Roger bargained with them, giving them little looking glasses, and strings of beads, in exchange for their wares.

"They are mighty reasonable in their demands," Roger said to Pengarvan. "It seems almost a shame to take these great baskets of fruit and vegetables, in return for such trifles."

"They are not trifles to them," the mate replied, "and there is nothing unfair in the exchange. These things are to them what gold and jewels are to us. We would give, gladly, a score of boatloads of vegetables for a diamond the size of a pea; and these glass beads are as valuable, in their eyes, as diamonds are in ours."

After buying up the main stock, they trafficked with the natives for the little ornaments they wore, necklaces and bracelets cunningly worked with bright shells and seeds, and weapons of curiously carved wood. At nightfall the other boats returned, laden down with fruit and vegetables.

"'We must buy no more of these commodities, at present," Captain Reuben said, when he saw what had been purchased on board. "We have got enough to last us as long as they will keep, eat we never so heartily;" and indeed, the next day a number of the crew were ill, from the quantity of fruit that they consumed.

This, however, soon passed off, and the change of diet did great good. The scurvy disappeared, and in a short time all–even those who had suffered most–were again fit for duty.

The following morning, Roger and Pengarvan went ashore with the starboard watch. The captain again accompanied them, and for hours they rambled about the island, wondering at the strange trees and foliage and the bright flowers; and filled especially with admiration at the tiny birds, with feathers like jewels, that flitted about among the flowers, and concerning which there was much dispute among the men–some asserting that they were a sort of great bee, while others maintained that they were birds. So quickly did they fly that the men, although they tried hard, failed to catch any of them; but the dispute as to their nature was solved, by the discovery that one of the chiefs had a robe fringed with the skins of these little creatures; and examining these they saw, surely enough, that they were birds, with feathers glistening in the sun like jewels of many colors Captain Reuben persuaded the chief to cut off the fringe and sell it to him, giving in exchange for it the high price of four copper rings, and a tiny looking glass.

In the afternoon the crew set to work to re-water the ship, and by nightfall all the casks were filled up, and the vessel was ready to proceed again on her way. The next morning sails were hoisted and the anchor weighed. The natives came out in great numbers in their canoes, and surrounded the Swan as she glided away from her anchorage, waving their hands and raising cries of farewell–evidently greatly satisfied at the treatment they had received at the hands of their white visitors.

For a fortnight the Swan cruised from island to island; but beyond giving the crew a run ashore at each, and so building up their strength and getting them in fighting trim, should there be occasion to call upon them for action, little advantage was obtained from these visits. Fruit and vegetables were obtainable in abundance; but beyond these, and little trinkets and feathers, there was no trade to be done.

"It is clear," Captain Reuben said, as he and his officers were gathered in the cabin, "that there is neither gain nor advantage to be obtained from trade here. The natives have doubtless sufficient for their wants, which are of the simplest; but of wealth such as we prize in England there is none to be had. It is different with the Spaniards–they make slaves of these poor creatures, and force them to till their plantations, to raise crops for them, and to work mines; but we, who cannot do these things, can get nothing from a longer stay in these coasts.

"We touched here chiefly to get water and fruit, to keep us all in health, and in that we have abundantly succeeded. We had best now shape our course westward, and try to find this new land, rich in gold, of which my friend the Spanish captain learned by report from the natives. So far we have fallen in with no Spaniards, but we may do so at any time; and although I have no fear of beating off any that might meddle with us, it would do us great harm did the news spread that a strange ship was in these waters; for they would assuredly send out expeditions in search of us, from all their ports, as soon as the news reached them."

The others quite agreed with Captain Reuben's views, and the next morning the ship's head was pointed west. Two days later, when passing an island they saw, on opening a headland, a port with many houses, and a Spanish flag flying from a mast on shore. Two large Spanish vessels were lying there. They were apparently on the point of sailing, for the sails were already dropped.

An exclamation of surprise broke from all on the deck of the Swan, and the men ran to the braces and sheets, in order to trim the sails.

"Steady, men!" Captain Reuben shouted. "Touch not sheet or tack. We must sail past as if bent on our own business. If we change our course, now, they will suspect that something is wrong.

"Pengarvan, do you get out the Spanish flag from the locker, and run it up to the peak."

This was done, though it was easy to see, by the looks the crew cast towards the strange craft, that they would gladly go in and fight them.

"Another time, lads," Captain Reuben said cheerfully, as he saw their mood. "I doubt not we shall have enough fighting to satisfy you, before we have done; but our object here is to trade, and get rich. If thrashing the Dons comes in the way of business, we shall do it contentedly; but there is no occasion for us to put ourselves out of the way to meet them. Supposing we were to go in, and sink those two ships; as I doubt not we are men enough to do, if we were to try it. They would see it all from the shore; and no sooner did we set sail again, than boats would carry the news to every Spanish port in these quarters, and we should have a score of ships in pursuit of us, in no time; and, whatever came of it, that would interfere with the hopes of gain with which we have sailed to these seas.

"This port must be a newly formed one," he went on, turning to Roger, "for there is no Spanish station marked hereabout, in my chart."

The course which the Swan was taking would have carried her half a mile to seaward of the two Spanish vessels, but she now edged a point or two farther out. Doubtless the Spaniards were surprised at seeing that the vessel, instead of entering the port, continued her course; and it may be that they very soon discovered such points in her hull, and rigging, as set them wondering what she could be.

Presently a gun was fired from one of the ships–as a signal, doubtless, for her to heave to. The Swan paid no attention to the command, but kept on her course. In two minutes there was another flash and a puff of white smoke from the Spaniard, and a shot skipped across the water in front of the Swan. A growl of anger broke from her crew.

"Put up the helm," Captain Reuben ordered; and the vessel, which was running before the wind, came up till her head pointed straight to sea.

Although the Spanish ships were still three-quarters of a mile away, a bustle was at once observable on their decks. Men clustered at the bows, and could be seen at work there.

"They are getting up the anchors," Pengarvan said, as he watched them, shading his eyes with his hands.

Three or four minutes later the sails were sheeted home, and the Spaniard began to move through the water, having set sail as soon as the anchors were tripped. No sooner were they under weigh, and the crews at their quarters, than they began to discharge their bow guns after the Swan.

"Shall we answer them, Captain?" James Standing asked. "We can bring a couple of guns aft, and fire over the rail."

"By no means," Captain Reuben replied. "At present they know nothing about us, and though they may guess that we are not licensed traders, with due authority to trade among the islands, I do not suppose they suspect, for a moment, that we are foreigners; but deem us a private venture, from one of their own ports. No Spanish trader would dare to fire on their own flag and, as long as we do not reply, they will suppose that we are only trying to escape the payment of some heavy fine, or perhaps forfeiture, for breach of their regulations.

"No, they can fire away. They are not likely to hurt us. They are fully a mile behind us, and we shall soon leave them."

But in this respect the captain was mistaken. The Spaniards were both fast vessels; and although the Swan kept her distance, those on board presently saw that she gained nothing. The shot continued to fall around them, but the Spaniards worked their guns slowly. The pieces on their forecastles were light ones, and though two or three shot passed through the sails of the Swan, they did but little damage.

"As long as they don't knock away a spar we will hold on," Captain Reuben said. "If they do, we will turn and fight them. But the wind is dropping a little, and I think that, if anything, we are gaining upon them now."

By the afternoon the Swan was fully two miles ahead, and the Spaniards had discontinued firing. The Swan was heading now to pass an island which had, for some hours, been visible ahead. Presently the Spaniards again began firing, although their shot fell in the water far astern of the Swan.

"What are the lubbers up to now?" James Standing said. "They cannot think they are going to frighten us into stopping, now that we have fairly got away from them."

Captain Reuben was anxiously gazing at the island ahead. They had laid their course to pass it to windward, as they sailed better, close-hauled, than did the Spaniard; who had not only fallen behind, but had lagged to leeward nigh half a mile.

"They must be firing as a signal," he said. "There may either be a Spanish port in the island, or they may know that there are some of their ships lying there; though I can see no signs, either of a port or ships."

"It would matter little if we could, Captain," Pengarvan said; "for any ships along that shore would be to leeward of us, and we should pass the end of the island long before they could beat up there; but it would be awkward if there happened to be a port, with two or three of their ships, just beyond that point. We should be caught between two fires then, and have to fight the lot of them."

The captain nodded.

"You are right, Pengarvan. We should be in a fix, then; and four Spaniards at once is more than we bargained for."

They were now within two miles of the point towards which they were steering, and towards which the eyes of the two officers on the poop were directed. Five minutes later an exclamation broke from them, simultaneously, as the sails of a lofty ship made their appearance over the extremity of the point, and a minute later a great hull came into sight.

"Helm to larboard," Captain Reuben ordered sharply. "We must run down the island. We can never weather that fellow that has just appeared.

"Ah! There are two others coming out. We are in a hornets' nest."

The sails were squared off, and the Swan was soon running before the wind; almost parallel with the coast, but edging in a little, to keep her farther from the vessels that had first chased them. These had also changed their course, and their position to leeward now gave them an advantage.

Ere long the Swan was almost abreast her late pursuers, who were about a mile and a quarter to seaward; while the other three Spanish ships, with all sails set, were a mile and a half astern, but a good deal nearer in shore.

"The sun will be down in another five minutes," Captain Reuben said, "and in half an hour it will be dark. The Spaniards can run quite as fast as we can–a bit faster, I think; but we can beat them, close hauled. The wind is falling lighter and lighter. If it was not for that, we would haul our wind and be off on the other tack, and throw all of them out. But it will be a dead calm before long, and they will be either lowering all their boats to attack us, or towing their ships up to us. If we were close under the land they might miss us, but they will be able to make us out, here. At any rate, we must hold on as we are, until the wind drops altogether."

After sunset the breeze died away rapidly and, by the time night had fully set in, the sails dropped motionless, and the Swan ceased to move through the water. The captain at once ordered all the boats to be lowered, and the men swarmed into them, double banking the oars. Hawsers were handed into them, and the vessel's head swept round in the direction from which she had come, but somewhat farther seaward.

"Now, lads," the captain said, "pull with a will. There will be a good supper, and an allowance of strong ale, when you come on board."

After rowing for half an hour, the captain ordered them to cease, and to keep silence. Listening attentively, he could hear in the still night air the sound of oars; but whether the boats were towing the ships, or rowing independently, he could not tell. Again the men set to work.

"I hope they are towing," he said to the first mate. "They would have no chance whatever of catching us, for our strong crew can take a vessel like the Swan through the water at twice the rate they could row their big ships. I can't see the fellows in shore, can you?"

"No, Captain. They are hid in the shadow of the land. I can make out the others, but they are a long way farther off than when we started."

"I expect we shall have the boats after us, Standing. Both lots can make us out, and can see that we are gaining on them.

"Ah! I felt a breath of wind. I did not expect it for an hour or two yet; but if the breeze springs up, we shall soon run away from them."

Stopping and listening again, they could hear the sound of oars, from two directions.

"They are coming," the captain said. "The beat is quicker than it would be if they were towing; besides, it is a great deal more distinct than it was. I don't think they are more than a mile behind us.

"Ah! There is the wind again."

There was a deep flapping sound, and a rattling of blocks, as the sails bellied out for a moment, and then fell against the masts again. Captain Reuben went to the forecastle:

"Keep it up, lads. You won't have much longer to row, for the wind is coming. The Spaniards are after us, but they won't be up for a quarter of an hour, and I hope we shall get it before that. Remember, every yard we can keep away from them is of importance. Put your backs to it, lads."

The Swan carried four boats and, strongly manned as these were, she was gliding through the water at a fair rate. It was five minutes before another breath of wind came, but this lasted three or four minutes, and greatly relieved the strain from the hawsers.

"She is going through the water now," the captain said. "They cannot be gaining very much upon us, at present.

"Confound it!" he added, a minute later. "There is an end of it again."

The boats were now but half a mile away, and the voices of the officers, urging the rowers to exert themselves, could be plainly heard, On the Swan the officers were all gazing in the direction from which the wind was to come. The yards were all braced sharply aft. Presently there was an exclamation of relief, as they felt the wind in their faces, and the vessel heeled a little over. The boats behind were but a quarter of a mile away now, while those from the vessels inshore were perhaps twice that distance.

"If this is the true breeze we are safe," the captain said. "If not, we shall have to fight for it."

The men had already, without orders, cast loose the guns, and armed themselves with pike and cutlass.

"Now listen, lads," the captain said, as he went forward to the poop rail, "if these fellows come up and try to board us, let no man utter a word. Fight like bulldogs, and as silently. We shall beat them off, never fear. No doubt they believe that we are their countrymen, who have broken their trading regulations, and are afraid of being overhauled. But if there is a word spoken they will know that we are foreigners, and we shall be chased wherever we go."

Then he went to the forecastle, and bade all the men in the boats cast off the hawsers and come on board. They were, indeed, no longer of any use, as the vessel was going through the water almost as fast as they could row ahead of her. As they gained the deck he repeated the orders he had given– that strict silence should be observed, in case the Spaniards came alongside.

Everything now depended on continuance of breeze, and those on board the boats saw that the vessel was now holding her own with them. Orders to throw the ship up into the wind and heave to were shouted and, as no attention was paid to these, several musket shots were fired at her; but the wind held and, faster and faster, the Swan made her way through the water. At last the boats fell behind, and were lost to sight.

"We are safe now," Reuben said, exultantly. "We are to windward of them all, and shall have them well out of sight, before morning."

When day broke, indeed, the topsails of three of the Spanish ships could be seen on the horizon; but in two or three hours these sank out of sight, and the Swan was headed on her course west.

Chapter 5: Shipwrecked

For six days the Swan sailed westward before a gentle wind. Then clouds were seen rising in the north, and spreading with great rapidity across the horizon.

"We are in for a tempest," Captain Reuben said. "Never have I seen the clouds rising more rapidly.

"Get her sail off her, Standing, as quickly as possible."

The crew fell to work, and in a very few minutes the Swan was stripped of the greater part of her canvas. But quickly as the men worked, the storm came up more rapidly, and the crew had but half finished their work when, with a roar and turmoil that almost bewildered them, the gale struck the vessel. Her head had been laid to the south, so that the wind should take her astern; and it was well that it was so, for had it struck her on the beam, she would assuredly have been capsized, even had not a rag of canvas been shown, for the wind would have caught her lofty forecastle and poop. As it was she plunged heavily forward, quivering as if from a blow. Then her bluff bows bore her up and, with a leap, she sprang forward and sped along before the gale.

"I have seen as sudden a squall among the Greek islands," Captain Reuben shouted in the mate's ear; "but never elsewhere. I hope that this may prove as short as do the gales in that quarter."

"I hope so," the mate replied, "for we know not how far the land may be distant."

But though the captain knew it not, they had been caught in one of those furious gales that were, afterwards, the terror of the Spaniards; blowing for a week or ten days without intermission, and being the cause of the wreck of many a stout ship. The sea got up rapidly, and the wind seemed to increase in fury as night fell, and for three days the ship ran before it. The waist was frequently deluged with water, and it required six men at the helm to keep her straight before the wind.

The crew were worn out with fatigue and want of sleep, for running as they were in this unknown sea, none could say what might happen, or when land might be sighted ahead. The captain never left the poop–he and the mates taking their places, by turn, with the men at the helm; for the slightest error in steering might have caused the vessel to broach to, in which case nothing could have saved her. Sheltered as was the caboose, it was found impossible to keep a fire alight, and officers and men, alike, had to content themselves with biscuit and draughts of ale.

The vessel rolled till her bulwarks were under water, and the yardarms at times dipped into the sea, and the men on deck were forced to lash themselves to some standing object, to retain their footing. The captain occasionally made his way forward to the forecastle, where the men not on duty were huddled together, and spoke cheeringly to them, saying that the gale could not last much longer, and that as the Swan had weathered it so far, she would hold on to the end.

At the commencement of the storm a tremendous rain had fallen, but when this had ceased the sky had cleared up, and for the last two days the sun had shone out brightly, and not a cloud had been seen.

When morning broke on the fourth day a cry of dismay broke from the wearied men on deck, for ahead could be seen land, stretching away on both bows. The news brought the crew from below, and they clustered on the forecastle, gazing in the direction of this new danger.

"We must try and get some sail on her mizzen, Standing," the captain said. "Our only chance is to bring her head to wind."

"We can try, Captain, but I fear that you will never bring her round."

"It is our only chance," the captain repeated, and with a loud shout, he called for some hands to come aft.

The mizzen was shaken out and, as soon as the sheets were hauled aft, the helm was put down. A cry burst from the crew as she came round, for as the wind took her on the beam she lay farther and farther over. A great wave struck her broadside, sweeping the bulwarks away as if they had been paper, and carrying a number of the crew off the forecastle into the sea. Still farther over she went, and all thought that she would capsize; when there were a series of reports, like musket shots, as the lashings of the shrouds parted. This was followed instantly by a crash, as the mizzen mast snapped off, two feet above the deck.

Relieved of the strain, the Swan righted somewhat. Another great wave swept over her forecastle, still further diminishing the number of the crew, but it carried her head round. She came up onto an even keel, and again started on her mad course before the wind.

"Go forward, Pengarvan, and see how many hands we have lost," the captain said. "Not that it makes much difference, for they have but gone a short time before the rest of us, for nothing short of a miracle can save us, now."

It could now be seen that the coast was steep and rocky, and that the waves were breaking with tremendous force upon it. It was but about four miles distant, and in less than half an hour they would be upon it.

"We must try to anchor, Standing."

The first mate shook his head.

"We will try, Captain, but our anchors will never hold her in the teeth of this gale. If they did, the hawsers would go like pack thread."

"I am afraid so, Standing; but there is nothing else to do."

The first mate went forward, and he and Pengarvan saw the anchors got in readiness, and the cables ranged along, so as to run out with perfect freedom. Then Pengarvan made his way aft again to the poop.

"Do you mean to cut away the mast, Captain?"

The captain nodded.

"I wouldn't, sir," the mate went on. "She will never hold, mast or no mast; and if it stands, we make a shift to run her head foremost on the rocks, and this will give us a better chance than if she drifts broadside on."

"You are right, Pengarvan. Yes, it will be better to leave it standing."

When within a quarter of a mile of the shore, the helm was again put down and, as the vessel came partly round, the the anchors were let go. The hawsers ran out rapidly, and the topsail, which was the only sail on her, was let go, the wind catching it and tearing it into ribbons as it was loosed. There was a jerk and a surge as the anchors brought her up, but at the same moment a great wave struck her head. The cables parted, and she again swung round towards the shore.

"It is all over with us, my lad," the captain said to Roger, who was standing quietly beside him. "God forgive me, I have brought you all here to die."

"It is not your fault, father. It was all for the best, and we knew when we started that there were perils before us."

"Goodbye, my lads! We will die as we have lived–brave men–and may God have mercy on us all.

"Now, Roger, obey my last orders. Go forward, and climb up to the end of the bowsprit. It may be that, if she strikes, you may be able to leap forward onto the rocks. They are somewhat lower, just ahead, than elsewhere."

"But I do not want to be saved, if no one else is, father," Roger cried passionately.

"You have always obeyed me heretofore," the captain said, quietly, "and you will do so now. Go forward at once, and do as I say. God bless you, my boy."

He clasped Roger in his arms, in a moment's close embrace, and then pointed forward.

Roger's eyes were blinded with tears as he obeyed the order. The bowsprit in those days did not, as now, run out almost horizontally from the ship's bow; but stood up like a mast, leaning somewhat over the bow, and carried a yard and small square sail upon it. Roger climbed up as far as the yard and then, aiding himself by the halyards, swarmed up until he reached the cap. When he did so the vessel was but little more than a hundred yards from the shore.

The water was deep up to the rocks, for the waves struck on these unbroken, flying up in masses of spray which flew far over the land. On his lofty post, thirty feet above the forecastle and forty-five above the water, Roger was nearly level with the top of the rock ahead; and as the vessel rose on the waves, could see a flat land, extending far inland.

He looked down. Two or three of the sailors had followed him as high as the yard, and many others were gathered on the forecastle. Some were kneeling in prayer, others had thrown themselves down despairingly on the deck, but most were standing, looking forward with set faces at the rocky barrier so close at hand.

Roger looked aft. The men at the tiller had quitted it now, and gone forward. Standing and Pengarvan were standing, one on each side of the captain. The latter took off his cap and waved it to his son, and the mates lifted their hands in token of adieu.

A cry from below caused Roger, as he returned the salute, to look round. They were but a ship's length from the rocks. Another moment a great wave lifted the vessel, and on its crest she went thundering forward. The rocks seemed to leap up against the spar to which Roger clung. It snapped off just below his feet, then a great volume of water and spray shot up from below, and he was thrown high into the air. The wind caught him and carried him away inland, and he fell, with a crash that left him senseless.

It was long before he recovered consciousness. As soon as he did so, he crawled on his hands and knees to the edge of the cliff, and looked down. The Swan had disappeared. Not a sign of her remained, not so much as a floating timber showed on the surface of the water.

Roger crawled back again for some distance, and then threw himself down, and wept despairingly. He lay there for hours, until the heat of the sun, blazing almost vertically down, roused him. Then he got on to his feet and looked round.

In front of him stretched a slightly undulating country. Patches of maize, here and there, showed that it was cultivated; and in the distance he saw a large village, with buildings of a size that proved that the people had made some advance towards civilization. Slowly and painfully, for he was greatly bruised by his fall, he made his way to the nearest maize patch, and ate several heads of green corn. Then he started for the village.

When within a few hundred yards of it, he came upon three women, who were coming out with baskets on their heads. They paused as he approached them, and then, with a cry of astonishment and fear, turned and ran towards the village.

Their cries brought a number of people to the doors. Among these were many men, who had caught up spears, and bows and arrows, at the alarm. Seeing but one person approaching, in a garb altogether strange to them, they stood in surprise. As he came up their wonder heightened, at perceiving that his color was altogether different from their own; and they dropped their threatening weapons, and stood as if paralyzed by wonder.

Roger had not faltered in his step, as he saw them issue out. Death had no terror for him, now his father and all his friends were gone; and he was altogether reckless of what befell him. The fearlessness of his demeanor added to the effect produced by his appearance. His cap was gone, and the rays of the sun, falling upon his fair hair, added to the effect produced by his white skin.

The natives, taking him for a supernatural being, bowed themselves to the ground before him in an attitude of adoration. The cries and uproar that but a minute before had sounded in the village suddenly ceased, and were succeeded by the hush of deep awe.

Roger walked on between the prostrate natives, and seated himself on a stone at the door of a hut. The natives gradually rose to their feet and approached him timidly. He made signs that he wanted to drink, for a raging thirst had been induced by the heat.

One of the natives ran into a hut and reappeared with a bowl, filled with a liquid, which he humbly presented to Roger. The latter patted his head in token of thanks, and then took a long drink of the contents of the bowl. These were totally unlike anything he had before tasted; being pulque, a slightly fermented drink obtained from the juice of the agave, most useful of all the vegetable productions of Central America.

A native, who was distinguished by his dress from the rest, now gave an order; and in a short time two women approached, bearing a tray with some flat cakes of fine bread, and fruits of different kinds. More to please the natives than because he was hungry, for he felt little inclination for food, Roger partook of some of these.

The chief then harangued him at considerable length. When he had finished, Roger, who had stood up while he was addressing him, said:

"I do not know a single word of what you are saying to me, but I thank you for your kindness."

He then shook hands with the chief, to whom that form of greeting was evidently new, and patted him on the shoulder.

The chief then conducted him to a large house. It was no higher than the rest, but was built of stone, well fitted together. The roof was roughly thatched, and could, Roger thought, afford but a poor shelter in time of rain. He did not know that, except at the commencement of a storm, rain was of comparatively rare occurrence upon the coast.

Inside the house showed signs of comfort. There were some seats decorated with carving. A finely woven mat covered the floor. Arms and utensils hung from the walls.

Several of the natives, evidently persons of consideration in the village, followed the chief in. Some girls and women came in from an interior room, and saluted the stranger with the greatest respect. They examined him timidly, one of the younger girls touching his hand gently, as if to make sure that it was skin, and not some strange covering, that gave it its color.

Roger took off his jacket, which was by this time dry, and turned up the sleeve of his shirt. As he did so, a general exclamation of surprise and admiration broke from the natives at the whiteness of the skin; which was far more striking, to them, than the bronzed hue of his face and hands.

The chief made various signs, which Roger at last understood to be a question as to whence he had come. He pointed in the direction of the sea, and tried to signify that he had arrived from a very long distance.

An hour passed, and Roger was beginning to wonder what the next move would be, when a native entered and, saluting the chief, said something to him. The women and children at once retired. A few minutes afterwards the chief went to the door, and motioned Roger to accompany him.

Coming down the street of the village was a procession. At its head walked two persons, evidently of high rank. They wore mantles, falling from their shoulders nearly to the ground, ornamented with designs executed in brightly colored feathers. They had circlets of gold round their heads, and heavy necklaces and bracelets of the same metal. Beneath the mantles they wore short petticoats of soft white material. Their spears and their arms were carried behind them, by attendants. Behind these came a number of men and women, walking in regular order, carrying bowls of fruit, trays of cooked food, and other offerings.

Roger saw at once that they must have come from a place of importance; which must be near at hand, as they had doubtless set out upon the receipt of a message, dispatched by his present entertainer. He guessed that the report must have been a favorable one of him, and that the natives were impressed with the idea that he was a superior being. It was, therefore, needful for him to comport himself so that this impression should be confirmed.

The chiefs bowed profoundly as they approached him, stooping so far forward that one hand touched the earth, and was then carried to their forehead. Roger did not understand the meaning of this, but he bowed graciously, as if accepting the homage that was offered.

The bearers then advanced, and placed the offerings on the ground. Among these was a mantle similar to that worn by the chiefs, but more richly embroidered. It struck Roger that, as his white skin excited so much admiration, it would be as well to show it. He was, too, somewhat ashamed of his garments; which were much worn, had turned a dingy hue from the sun and salt water, and had, moreover, shrunk much from their recent immersion. Taking up the robe, therefore, he motioned to the chiefs to stay where they were and, returning into the room, stripped to his waist; and then, throwing the mantle over his shoulders, returned to the entrance.

Something like a shout of welcome saluted him. The whiteness of his skin, as seen through the open mantle, astonished the natives; and they accepted his assumption of the garment, with which he had been presented, as a sign of the benevolent intentions of this supernatural visitor towards them.

The ambassadors now made signs in the direction from which they had come, and seemed to ask if he were willing to accompany them. He nodded his assent, and in a few minutes the procession again started, the chiefs taking their places one on either side of him, and the villagers falling in behind. The women struck up a sort of chant, in which all except the chiefs joined. For an hour they kept on their way and then, on ascending a small hill, a large town was seen.

"Tabasco," the chief said, pointing towards it.

Roger repeated the word, and in doing so evidently gave much pleasure to the chiefs. As they approached the town he could see many lofty buildings rising above it; and, as they passed through a line of long palisades that surrounded the place, a body of men issued out to meet him.

As they approached, they formed in order on each side of the road. All were armed with spears tipped with sharp, shiny stones, and carried bows and arrows. They were dressed in doublets of thickly quilted cotton, capable of turning an arrow or resisting the thrust of a native spear; although they would offer but poor protection against English arrows, or English weapons.

As they entered the town the streets were lined with similarly dressed soldiers; behind whom stood a crowd of natives, men and women saluting their strange visitor with loud cries of welcome. The procession continued its way until it stopped before a large building, at the entrance to which stood an aged chief. His mantle was completely composed of feather work, and plumes of feathers sprang from the golden fillet that encircled his head. Behind him were clustered a number of inferior chiefs.

He welcomed Roger courteously but gravely; and Roger guessed, at once, that he was superior to the superstitions of his people, and that he viewed him with a certain amount of suspicion. Roger bowed and, taking off the jackknife, which hung in its sheath from a string at his waist, drew it out and presented it to the chief.

The latter was evidently greatly struck by the gift. Gold and silver he knew, but this bright and shining metal was altogether new to him. He examined it closely, felt the edge and point, and then handed it to the chiefs behind him, to be examined by them. Roger saw by his manner that he had been favorably impressed, for the weapon was as strange and mysterious, to him, as the visitant.

The chief undid a large gold necklace that he wore, and offered it to Roger, who bowed and clasped it round his neck. The chief now led him inside the house, which was similar, but on a much larger scale, to that which he had before entered. Refreshments were placed before him. These he did not need, but thought it better to eat of them. While he was so doing, an animated conversation was maintained between the chief and his followers.

After a time, the chief made signs to him to follow him, and conducted him to a smaller house close by, which he made signs to him that he was to consider as his own. Mats had been already spread on the ground; rugs made of quilted cotton, for sleeping upon, piled in a corner; vases of flowers placed about the room, and all made ready for occupation. An old woman, followed by two young girls, came forward and saluted to the ground. They were slaves, whom the chief had appointed to wait upon the visitor.

No sooner had the chief left than a perfect levee commenced, and went on for hours; until it seemed to Roger that every man, woman, and child in the town must have called upon him. Most of them brought little presents as tokens of goodwill. Garlands of flowers were thrown round his neck, baskets of fruit, cakes made from maize flour, dishes of meat of various kinds, little trinkets of gold, baskets containing beans and many other eatable seeds, and a ground powder of brownish hue, of whose uses Roger was ignorant, but which he afterwards discovered to be cocoa, which furnished the most popular beverage of the natives.

Not until it was quite dark did the stream of visitors cease. Then the old slave dropped a hanging across the door, and one of the young ones brought forward to Roger, who was utterly worn out with the fatigues of the day, a bowl of steaming cocoa, and some cakes of fruit. Roger found the cocoa extremely palatable, and wholly unlike anything he had ever before tasted; and it seemed to invigorate him greatly.

After drinking, he spread some of the quilted mats upon the floor, and threw himself down upon them. The old woman had lighted a lamp, and withdrawn with the younger ones to an apartment behind; which served as their sleeping place, as well as kitchen.

Now that he was alone and had time to think, Roger broke down entirely. Was it possible that it was but this morning he was on board ship, with his father and friends; and that now all were gone, gone forever, and he was in a strange land, cut off from all hope of return, surrounded by people who, if they were friendly today, might yet, for aught he knew, slay him on the morrow?

For the time, however, his own fate occupied him but little. His thoughts turned almost exclusively upon his father. Upon their voyages together, his kindness and care for him, the high hopes they had cherished when they started upon their voyage, and above all upon his parting words, and the last gesture of farewell, just as the ship struck.

For hours Roger lay and sobbed. At last he heard a slight movement in the room and, looking up, saw one of the young slave girls regarding him with a look of deep pity. To her, as to everyone else, Roger had appeared as a supernatural being, come from they knew not whence; but the lad's sobs had touched her human feelings, and shown her that he had sorrows, like herself. Her look brought a feeling of comfort and companionship to Roger's heart; and as, on seeing that she was observed, she turned timidly to retire, he held out his hand to her.

She approached and knelt down beside him and, taking his hand, pressed it to her forehead. She was a girl of some fourteen years old, already, according to Mexican ideas, a woman.

"What is your name?" Roger asked.

The girl looked at him wonderingly, but shook her head. Roger thought a moment, and then touched himself on the breast.

"Roger," he said.

He repeated the word several times. Then he touched her lips and repeated "Roger," and, seeing what was expected, she repeated the word in a soft voice.

He nodded again, touched himself and said "Roger," and then touched her. She now saw what he meant. It was his own name he had spoken, and he now asked for hers.

"Malinche," she said, in her soft Indian voice.

"Malinche," he repeated, "you are a kind-hearted girl. I can see that, Malinche; and I hope we shall understand each other better, one of these days. I suppose you are a servant or a slave, and are not in a much better condition than myself. Now you had better go, and sleep."

He patted her on the shoulder, pointed to the door by which she had entered, closed his eyes as if in sleep, and then said, "Good night, Malinche."

The girl uttered some words he did not understand; but as they ended with Roger, and with a nod of her head she stole silently away, he supposed that it was something equivalent to his own "Goodnight."

Greatly comforted by this little incident, he rolled up one of the rugs as a pillow, laid his head upon it, and was almost instantaneously asleep. He woke with a feeling of surprise. The events of the previous day seemed to him but a dream, and he looked round, expecting to see the bulkhead of the little cabin he had occupied, on board the Swan. But the first glance assured him of the reality of the dream, and that he was alone, among a strange people.

He sprang at once to his feet, pulled aside a cloth that hung before an opening that served as a window, and let the rays of the sun stream in.

"I want some water, old dame," he said, in a loud voice.

The old woman at once entered. Roger made signs, by rubbing his hands together, and passing them over his face and head, that he wanted water. This the old woman brought, in a basin formed of the half of an immense gourd, and a soft cotton cloth with which to dry himself. Then she brought in a small pot, filled with something which looked to him like fat, but which he afterwards found was extracted from a vegetable, and put it down by the side of the water.

"I suppose that this is some sort of soap," Roger said to himself, and found on trial, to his great satisfaction, that it made an excellent lather.

After a good wash he felt greatly refreshed, and now attired himself completely in Mexican costume, a pile of garments of all sorts having been placed in one corner of the room. When he had finished the two girls entered, with a tray containing cocoa, fruits, and bread. He was about to address Malinche by her name; but the girl kept her eyes fixed upon the ground, and it struck him that she did not wish her late visit to him to be known, as it might bring upon her a scolding from the old woman; whose voice he had more than once heard, on the previous afternoon, raised in shrill anger.

He therefore began afresh, first naming himself, and then touching Malinche's companion.

She did not at first understand, but Malinche said something in a low tone, and she then replied, "Nishka."

Roger repeated the name, and then touched Malinche, who at once gave her name.

He next pointed to the contents of the bowl, and the girls replied together, "Coca."

Roger repeated the word several times, and then, in the same manner, learned the native names of the cakes and fruit.

The old woman, hearing the voices, now came into the room. The girls spoke eagerly to her in their language, and when Roger touched her, she at once answered, "Quizmoa."

"That is pretty well, for a first lesson," Roger said. "Now I will eat my breakfast. I suppose that, if anyone in this place did not have a stare at me yesterday, they will be coming today."

Visitors, indeed, soon began to arrive; and it was more than a week before the curiosity of the crowd was at all satisfied. But even this did not bring what Roger considered a terrible annoyance to an end; for the news had spread rapidly, through all the country round, of the strange white being who had come to Tabasco, and parties of visitors kept on arriving, some of them from a great distance.

Roger, however, had made a good use of his tongue. He kept one or other of the girls always near him, and by touching the articles brought to him as presents, the garments and arms of his visitors, and the various objects in his room, he soon learned their names.

Almost every day the chief sent for him, for a talk; but as neither party could understand the other, these conversations generally ended by a sudden loss of temper, on the part of the cazique, at being unable to obtain the information he required as to the origin of his visitor, and the object with which he had come to his country.

Having acquired a large number of the names of objects, Roger, for a time, came to a standstill. Then it struck him that by listening to what the old woman said to the girls, and by watching what they did, he might make a step farther.

In this way he soon learned "bring me," "fetch me," and other verbs. When the old woman was present, the two girls were silent and shy; but as Quizmoa was fond of gossiping, and so was greatly in request among the neighbors, who desired to learn something of the habits of the white man, she was often out; and the girls were then ready to talk as much as Roger wished. For a time it seemed to him that he was making no progress whatever with the language and, at the end of the first month, began almost to despair of ever being able to converse in it; although by this time he had learned the name of almost every object. Then he found that, perhaps as much from their gestures as from their words, he began to understand the girls; and in another month was able to make himself understood, in turn. After this his progress was extremely rapid.

As soon as Malinche learned, from him, that he belonged to a great nation of white people, living far away across the sea, and that he had been wrecked in a ship upon the coast, she warned him against telling these things to the chief.

"They hold you in high honor," she said, "because they think that you have come down from the sky, and might do them grievous harm if they displeased you. But if they knew that you were a man like themselves, cast by chance upon their shores, they would perhaps make you a slave, or might put you to death in one of the temples. Therefore, on this subject be always silent. When the chief asks you questions, shake your head, and say that these things cannot be spoken of, and that it might bring down the anger of the gods, were their secret told."

The advice seemed good to Roger, and he followed it. Now that he was able to talk in his language, the chief soon plied him with questions as to whence he had come. But Roger always shook his head when the subject was approached, and said:

"It is not good to talk of these things. Evil might come to the land. I am here, and that is enough. I will tell you many things about other people, who live far over the sea, and who are very great and powerful. When they go out they sit upon great animals, which carry them easily, at a speed much exceeding that at which a man can run. They live in lofty dwellings and, when they go to war, are covered with an armor, made of a metal so strong that arrows would not pierce it nor swords cut it. They traverse the sea in floating castles; and when they want to convey their thought to others, many days' journey away, they make marks upon a thin white stuff they call paper, and send it by a messenger, and these marks tell him who receives it what the writer's thoughts are, just the same as if he had spoken in their ears."

The hearing of such wonders as these reconciled the chief to his disappointment at not learning more about his visitor. The knife Roger had given him was a never-ending source of wonder to the cazique, and those whom he permitted to inspect it. Gold and silver and copper they knew, and also tin, which they used for hardening the copper. But this new metal was altogether strange to them. It enormously exceeded copper in strength and hardness. Its edge did not, like that of their own weapons, blunt with usage, and they could well understand that, if armor could be formed of it, it would be altogether unpierceable.

For a time Roger was every day at the chief's house, and his narration afforded astonishment and wonder to the audiences that gathered round him. At the same time, Roger perceived that a difference of opinion existed, among the principal men, concerning him. Some believed, as at first, in his supernatural origin, and credited all that he told them; while others were of opinion that he was a man, like themselves, only of different color, and that these tales were simply inventions, designed to add to his importance.

The fact that month after month passed without his exhibiting any supernatural powers, or reproducing, in any way, the wonders of which he told them, added gradually to the strength of the party hostile to him. Why should this god, if he were a god, have come to dwell at Tabasco only to learn the language, and behave as an ordinary man? He had been kindly received–why did he not bestow benefits in return? Were the fields more fruitful? Had any extraordinary prosperity fallen upon the people since his arrival among them? Had he taught them any of the arts of those people of whom he spoke? The gods always bestowed benefits upon those among whom they dwelt. He did not ever pay reverence to their gods, nor had he entered a temple to worship or sacrifice. How then could he be a god?

Gradually this opinion gained strength, and Roger perceived that his popularity was decreasing. No longer were daily presents sent in by the inhabitants of Tabasco. No longer did they prostrate themselves, when he walked in the streets. His stories were received with open expressions of doubt and derision, and he saw that, ere long, some great change would take place in his condition.

One morning, to his surprise, the chief with six men entered his chamber, and ordered him to come out and accompany them, instantly. Much surprised at the order, Roger at once went out.

"You must go away for a time," the cazique said; "but you shall return, before long."

His guard conducted him eight or ten miles into the interior, and established him in a hut, situated at a distance from any other dwelling. Three of them, by turns, kept watch night and day over him, refusing to answer any questions as to the cause of this singular conduct. Beyond being kept a prisoner he had nothing to complain of, being well fed and treated with all courtesy.

A fortnight later he was taken back to Tabasco, as suddenly as he had left it. When he arrived there, he learned the reason of his being carried inland. A great floating castle, filled with white men, had arrived at the mouth of the river; and had opened a trade with the natives, exchanging glass beads, looking glasses, and trinkets, for gold ornaments and articles of Mexican workmanship. Their leader, he heard, was called Grijalva. The cazique had been afraid that, if Roger had heard that other white men were in the river, he would make an effort to join them; or if they heard that a man of their color was in the town, they would insist upon his being handed over to them. He had therefore hurried him away inland, and had issued the most stringent orders that none should, by signs or otherwise, acquaint the newcomers that a white man was in the town. A guard had been placed over the house in which Roger had dwelt, and none of those within it had been allowed to go out, while the strangers were in the river.

These had sailed away, the day before Roger was fetched back. He was not altogether disappointed at having missed the strangers, who were of course Spaniards; for he wanted, if possible, to see something more of this beautiful country before he left; and he was, moreover, more than doubtful as to the reception he should meet with at the Spaniards' hands, when, by his ignorance of their language, they discovered that he was a foreign intruder, in what they considered their territory.

Chapter 6: Anahuac

It was now six months since Roger was wrecked on the coast of Tabasco, he spoke the native language with perfect fluency, and had learned all that was known as to the nations round Tabasco. Malinche was his chief source of information. She herself did not belong to the country, but, as she told Roger, to a tribe that had been conquered by far mightier people, called Aztecs, who lived farther to the west.

It was from them, she said, that the people of Tabasco obtained their gold; which was there very plentiful, and was thought but little of, as being useful only for ornaments, drinking cups, and similar purposes. They dwelt in a city named Mexico, standing in the midst of a lake. There were kindred peoples near them, and the country generally was called Anahuac. All were subject to the Aztecs, and their armies had gradually conquered all the surrounding peoples.

They possessed great temples, compared to which those of Tabasco were as nothing. Their gods were very powerful, and all prisoners taken in war were sacrificed to them. They had rich mantles and clothing, and the Tabascans were but savages, in comparison.

Being asked how it was that she, who was a native of such a nation, came to be a slave among the Tabascans, she replied with tears that she had been sold. Her father had been a rich and powerful cazique, of Painalla, on the southeastern borders of the Mexican kingdom. He had died when she was very young, and her mother had married again, and had a son. One night her mother had handed her over to some traders, by whom she had been carried away. She had learned, from their conversation, that her mother desired her son to inherit all her possessions; and that she had, therefore, sold her to these traders. The daughter of one of her slaves had died that evening, and she intended to give out that Malinche was dead, and to celebrate her funeral in the usual way. The traders had brought her to Tabasco, and sold her to the cazique of that town.

"But this mother of yours must be an infamous woman, Malinche," Roger said indignantly, "thus to sell away her own daughter to be a slave!"

"Girls are not much good," Malinche said, sadly. "They cannot fight, and they cannot govern a people. It was natural that my mother should prefer her son to me, and should wish to see him a cazique, when he grew up."

Roger refused to see the matter in that light, at all, and was indignant at Malinche for the forbearance that she showed, in speaking of the author of her misfortunes.

This conversation had taken place at the time when Roger had first learned to converse in the Tabascan language. The girl's statements, with regard to the wealth of the country to which she belonged, had fired his imagination. This was doubtless the country concerning which rumors were current among the Spanish islands, and with whom it had been the purpose of his father's expedition to open trade.

Malinche told him that they spoke a language quite different from that of the Tabascans. There were many dialects among the various peoples under the sway of the Aztecs; but all could understand each other, as they had all come down, from the far north, to settle in the country.

Thinking the matter over he determined, if possible, that he would someday make his way over to Malinche's country, which seemed so far in advance of the Tabascans.

"The Spaniards will go there some day," he said; "and although they would kill me without hesitation, if they found an Englishman there before them; I might yet, in some way or other, manage to achieve my escape."

Accordingly, he asked Malinche to teach him her language; and at the end of the six months he could converse with her in it, almost as readily as he could in Tabascan; for in learning it he had none of the initial difficulties he had at first encountered, in acquiring Tabascan–the latter language serving as a medium.

The year which had elapsed, since the Swan sailed from Plymouth, had effected great alteration in Roger's figure. He had grown several inches, and had widened out greatly; and was fulfilling the promise of his earlier figure, by growing into an immensely large and powerful man. He was, even now, half a head taller than the very tallest of the natives of Tabasco; and in point of strength, was still more their superior. Thus, although the belief in his supernatural origin was rapidly dying out, a certain respect for his size and strength prevented any of his opponents from any open exhibition of hostility. The fact, too, of his perfect fearlessness of demeanor added to this effect. Roger carried himself well, and as, with head erect, he strolled through the streets of Tabasco, with a step that contrasted strongly with the light and nimble one of the slenderly built natives, men made way for him; while his sunny hair, which fell in short waves back from his forehead, his fearless gray eyes, and the pleasant expression of his mouth, rendered him a source of admiration to the women; who, with scarce an exception, still believed firmly that he was no ordinary human being.

One day, when Roger was dressing in the morning, he heard excited talking in the street, and the sound of hurrying feet.

"What has happened this morning, Malinche?" he called out.

"The merchants have come," she said. "The merchants from my country."

As Roger had heard, from her, that a trade was carried on by Mexico with the surrounding countries, by merchants who traveled in parties, with strong bodies of armed men, and that they had been at Tabasco but a few days only before he had first arrived there, and might be expected again in about a year, he was not surprised at the news. He had, indeed, been looking forward to this visit; for he felt that his position was getting more and more unsafe, and that the cazique would not be able, much longer, to support him against the hostility of the majority of the men of importance in the town. What he had heard from Malinche had greatly raised his curiosity with regard to her country, and his longing to see these people, whom she described as invincible in war, and so infinitely superior in civilization to the Tabascans.

He had closely inquired, from Malinche, whether she thought he would be well received, did he reach her country. Malinche's opinion was not encouraging.

"I think," she said, "that they would sacrifice you in the temples. All our gods love sacrifices, and every year countless persons are offered up to them."

"It is a horrible custom, Malinche."

Malinche did not seem to be impressed, as he expected.

"Why?" she asked. "They would be killed in battle, were they not kept for sacrifice. The Aztecs never kill if they can help it, but take prisoners, so that death comes to them in one way instead of another; and it is better to be killed in the service of the gods, than to fall uselessly in battle."

"I don't think so at all, Malinche. In battle one's blood's up, and one scarcely feels pain; and if one is killed one is killed, and there is an end of it. That is quite different to being put to death in cold blood. And do they sacrifice women, as well as men?"

"Sometimes, but not so many," she said; "and in dry weather they offer up children to Talloc, the god of rain."

"But they cannot capture them in war," Roger said, horrified.

"No, they are sold by their parents, who have large families, and can do without one or two."

To Malinche, brought up in the hideous religion of the Mexicans, these things appeared as a matter of course; and she could scarcely understand the horror, and disgust, which her description of the sacrifices to her gods caused him.

"And you think that they would sacrifice me, Malinche?"

"I cannot say," she replied. "The priests are masters in these things. If they said sacrifice, they would sacrifice you; but if they thought you a god, you would be treated with great honor. How can I tell? I think that they would pay you greater honor than here, but of course I cannot tell."

"Why should they pay me greater honor, Malinche?"

"Because one of our gods was white. Quetzalcoatl was the kindest of our gods. He taught us the use of metals, instructed us how to till the ground, and laid down all the rules for good government. When he lived in Anahuac everyone was happy. Every head of corn was so big that a man could scarce carry one. The earth was full of flowers and fruit. Cotton grew of many colors, so that there was no need to dye it, and the very birds sang more sweetly than they have ever sung since. Ah! If Quetzalcoatl had always stopped with us, we should have been happy, indeed!"

"But why did he not, Malinche?"

Malinche shook her head.

"He was a god, but not one of the greatest, and one of these grew angry with him–I cannot tell who. Perhaps it was the god of war, who saw that the Anahuans were so happy that they no longer went out to conquer other people, and to provide sacrifices for him. Perhaps they were jealous, because the people worshiped Quetzalcoatl more than them. Anyhow, they were angry with him, and he was obliged to leave us.

"He came down to the sea, and took leave of the people, promising that he or his descendants would some day revisit them. Then he took his seat in his boat, which was formed of serpent skins, and sailed away, and has never been seen again. But we all know that one day, if he does not come himself, white people will come from the sea to us.

"I think, Roger, that you are one of the descendants of Quetzalcoatl; and I think my countrymen would think so, too, and would hold you in great honor, if the priests, who are very powerful, did not turn them against you."

"What was this god like?" asked Roger.

"He was tall in stature, and he had a white skin; and his hair was not like yours, for it was long and dark, and flowed over his shoulders, and he had a great beard. But as you are tall and white, you are like him; and as he went towards the rising sun, it may be that, afterwards, his hair changed from black to a color like yours, which seems to me brown when you are sitting here, but gold when the sun falls on it."

"So it seems, Malinche, that I may be sacrificed, or I may be taken for a god! I would much rather that they would be content to treat me for what I am–a man like themselves, only of a different race and color."

Roger had many conversations of this kind with Malinche, and as he felt his position becoming daily more precarious among the Tabascans, had come to believe that he should have at least as good a chance, among the Aztecs, as where he was.

In return for all the girl told him about her country, he told her much about his own. He explained to her that there were many peoples among the whites, as among the reds; and they fought against each other in battle, having weapons which made a noise like thunder, and killed at a great distance. He told her how one of these peoples, named Spaniards, had conquered many islands not very far distant from Tabasco; and how assuredly they would come, in time, and try to conquer this country, too. He explained that, while the nation to which he belonged was, at present, at peace with the Spaniards, they were not allowed to come into this part of the world; and that, had he and those who had sailed with him fallen into their hands, they would have been all put to death.

The news, then, that the Aztec traders had arrived was a matter of as much interest, to Roger, as to the people of the town. These looked forward to purchasing many things which they could not otherwise obtain; for the gold ornaments, the rich feather mantles, and most of the other articles of superior manufacture which Roger had seen, were not the work of the natives of Tabasco, but of their powerful neighbors.

The traders would stay, Malinche said, for four or five days, at least; and Roger, therefore, thought it better not to go out to see them, until he learned what were the cazique's views concerning him. He therefore remained quietly at home, all day.

Upon the following morning he received a summons from the cazique.

"White man," the chief said, "I have spoken to the Anahuac traders concerning you, and they have a great desire to see you. Therefore you will, this morning, accompany us to their camp."

An hour afterwards Roger started with the cazique, and a numerous body of the latter's counselors and attendants. The encampment of the Anahuans was a quarter of a mile from the town. In the center rose a large tent, the abode of the merchants; and around, ranged in regular order, were the rough huts erected by their escort.

These were assembled in military array. They were, like the Tabascan soldiers, clad in thick quilted doublets. Their spears were tipped with copper; or with obsidian, a stone resembling flint, of great hardness, and capable of taking a very sharp edge.

In front of the tent were several banners, embroidered in different devices in gold and feather work. Roger afterwards learned that merchants were held in far higher consideration in Anahuac than in Europe, that their business was considered as one of great honor, and that they were permitted to assume what may be called heraldic devices on their standards, to carry bright-feathered plumes, and to wear gold ornaments–such decorations being only allowed to warriors who had, by their deeds in battle, been admitted into an institution which closely resembled that of knighthood; all others dressing in plain white cloths, woven from thread obtained from the aloe. Even members of the royal family were not exempted from this law.

The whole trade of the country was in the hands of these merchants, who traded not only to its utmost borders, but with neighboring people. They were allowed to raise forces sufficient for their protection; they furnished the government with descriptions of the people they visited; and often afforded the State a pretext for wars and annexations, by getting up quarrels with the natives. They resembled, in fact, the East India Company during the last century, mingling in their persons the military and mercantile character.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.