

THE TREASURE SHIP

Rafael Sabatini

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IT was a saying of Captain Blood's that the worth of a man manifests itself not so much in the ability to plan great undertakings as in the vision which perceives opportunity and the address which knows how to seize it.

He had certainly displayed these qualities in possessing himself of that fine Spanish ship the Cinco Llagas and he had displayed them again in foiling the designs of that rascally buccaneer Captain Easterling to rob him of that noble vessel.

Meanwhile, his own and his ship's near escape made it clear to all who followed him that there was little safety for them in Tortuga waters, and little trust to be placed in buccaneers. At a general council held that same afternoon in the ship's waist, Blood propounded the simple philosophy that when a man is attacked he must either fight or run.

"And since we are in no case to fight when attacked, as no doubt we shall be, it but remains to play the coward's part if only so that we may survive to prove ourselves brave men some other day."

They agreed with him. But whilst the decision to run was taken, it was left to be determined later whither they should repair. At the moment all that mattered was to get away from Tortuga and the further probable attentions of Captain Easterling.

Thus it fell out that, in the dead of the following night, which if clear was moonless, the great frigate, which once had been the pride of the Cadiz shipyards, weighed anchor as quietly as such an operation might be performed. With canvas spread to the faint favouring breeze from the shore and with the ebb tide to help the manoeuvre, the Cinco Llagas stood out to sea. If groan of windlass, rattle of chain, and creak of blocks had betrayed the action to Easterling aboard the Bonaventure, a cable's length away, it was not in Easterling's power to thwart Blood's intention. At least three quarters of his rascally crew were in the taverns ashore, and Easterling was not disposed to attempt boarding operations with the remnant of his men, even though that remnant outnumbered by two to one the hands of the Cinco Llagas. Moreover, even had his full complement of two hundred been aboard, Easterling would still have offered no opposition to that departure. Whilst in Tortuga waters he might have attempted to get possession of the Cinco Llagas quietly and by strategy, not even his recklessness could consider seizing her violently by force in such a sanctuary, especially as the French Governor, Monsieur d'Ogeron, appeared to be friendly disposed towards Blood and his fellow fugitives.

Out on the open sea it would be another matter; and the tale he would afterwards tell of the manner in which the Cinco Llagas should have come into his possession would be such as no one in Cayona would be in a position to contradict.

So Captain Easterling suffered Peter Blood to depart unhindered, and was well content to let him go. Nor did he display any undue and betraying haste to follow. He made his preparations with leisureliness, and did not weigh anchor until the afternoon of the morrow. He trusted his wits to give him the direction Blood must take and depended upon the greater speed of the Bonaventure to overhaul him before he should have gone far enough for safety. His reasoning was shrewd enough. Since he knew that the Cinco Llagas was not victualled for a long voyage, there could be no question yet of any direct attempt to sail for Europe. First she must be equipped, and since to equip her Blood dared approach no English or Spanish settlement, it followed that he would steer for one of the neutral Dutch colonies, and there take his only remaining chance. Nor was Blood likely without experienced pilotage to venture among the dangerous reefs of the Bahamas. It was therefore an easy inference that his destination would be the Leeward Islands with intent to put in at San Martin, Saba, or Santa Eustacia. Confident, then, of overtaking him before he could make the nearest of those Dutch settlements, two hundred leagues away, the pursuing Bonaventure steered an easterly course along the northern shores of Hispaniola.

Things, however, were not destined to be so simple as Easterling conjectured. The wind, at first favourable, veered towards evening to the east, and increased throughout the night in vehemence; so that by dawn Ñ an angry

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dawn with skies ominously flushed Ñ the Bonaventure had not merely made no progress, but had actually drifted some miles out of her course. Then the wind shifted to the south towards noon, and it came on to blow harder than ever. It blew up a storm from the Caribbean, and for twenty–four hours the Bonaventure rode it out with bare yards and hatches battened against the pounding seas that broke athwart her and tossed her like a cork from trough to crest.

It was fortunate that the burly Easterling was not only a stout fighter, but also an able seaman. Under his skilled handling, the Bonaventure came through the ordeal unscathed, to resume the chase when at last the storm had passed and the wind had settled to a steady breeze from the south–west. With crowded canvas the sloop now went scudding through the heaving seas which the storm had left.

Easterling heartened his followers with the reminder that the hurricane which had delayed them must no less have delayed the Cinco Llagas; that, indeed, considering the lubbers who handled the erstwhile Spanish frigate, it was likely that the storm had made things easier for the Bonaventure.

What exactly the storm had done for them they were to discover on the following morning, when off Cape Engano they sighted a galleon which at first, in the distance, they supposed to be their quarry, but which very soon they perceived to be some other vessel. That she was Spanish was advertised not only by her towering build, but by the banner of Castile which she flew beneath the Crucifix at the head of her mainmast. On the yards of this mainmast all canvas was close–reefed, and under the spread of only foresail mizzen and sprit, she was labouring clumsily towards the Mona Passage with the wind on her larboard quarter.

The sight of her in her partially maimed condition stirred Easterling like a hound at sight of a deer. For the moment the quest of the Cinco Llagas was forgotten. Here was more immediate prey and of a kind to be easily reduced.

At the poop rail he bawled his orders rapidly. In obedience the decks were cleared with feverish speed and the nettings spread from stem to stern to catch any spars that might be shot down in the approaching action. Chard, Easterling's lieutenant, a short, powerful man, who was a dullard in all things save the handling of a ship and the wielding of a cutlass, took the helm. The gunners at their stations cleared the leaden aprons from the touch–holes and swung their glowing matches, ready for the word of command. For however disorderly and unruly Easterling's crew might be at ordinary times, it knew the need for discipline when battle was to be joined.

Watchful on the poop the buccaneer captain surveyed the Spaniard upon which he was rapidly bearing down, and observed with scorn the scurry of preparation on her decks. His practised eye read her immediate past history at a glance, and his harsh, guttural voice announced what he read to Chard who stood below him at the whipstaff.

"She would be homing for Spain when the hurricane caught her. She's sprung her mainmast and likely suffered other damage besides, and she's beating back to San Domingo for repairs." Easterling laughed in his throat and stroked his dense black beard. The dark, bold eyes, in his great red face glinted wickedly. "Give me a homing Spaniard, Chard. There'll be treasure aboard that hulk. By God, we're in luck at last."

He was, indeed. It had long been his grievance, and the true reason of his coveting the Cinco Llagas, that his sloop the Bonaventure was unequal to tackling the real prizes of the Caribbean. And he would never have dared to attack this heavily armed galleon but that in her crippled condition she was unable to manoeuvre so as to bring her guns to bear upon his flanks.

She gave him now a broadside from her starboard quarter, and by doing so sealed her own doom. The Bonaventure, coming head on, presented little target, and save for a round shot in her forecastle took no damage. Easterling answered the fire with the chasers on his prow, aiming high, and sweeping the Spaniard's decks. Then, nimbly avoiding her clumsy attempt to go about and change their relative positions, the Bonaventure was alongside on the quarter of her empty guns. There was a rattling, thudding jar, a creak of entangled rigging, a crack and clatter of broken spars, and the thud of grapnels rending into the Spaniard's timbers to bind her fast, and then, tight–locked, the two vessels went drifting down wind, whilst the buccaneers, led by the colossal Easterling, and after discharging a volley of musketry, swarmed like ants over the Spaniard's bulwarks. Two hundred of them there were, fierce fellows in loose leathern breeches, some with shirts as well, but the majority naked to the waist, and by that brown muscular nakedness the more terrific of aspect.

To receive them stood a bare fifty Spaniards in corselet and morion, drawn up in the galleon's waist as if upon parade, with muskets calmly levelled and a hawk–faced officer in a plumed hat commanding them.

The officer spoke an order, and a volley from the muskets momentarily checked the assault. Then, like an

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engulfing wave, the buccaneer mob went over the Spanish soldiers, and the ship, the Santa Barbara, was taken.

There was not perhaps upon the seas at the time a more cruel, ruthless man than Easterling; and those who sailed with him adopted, as men will, their captain's standard of ferocity. Brutally they exterminated the Spanish soldiery, heaving the bodies overboard, and as brutally they dealt with those manning the guns on the main deck below, although these unfortunates readily surrendered in the vain hope of being allowed to keep their lives.

Within ten minutes of the invasion of the Santa Barbara there remained alive upon her of her original crew only the captain, Don Ildefonso de Paiva, whom Easterling had stunned with the butt of a pistol, the navigating officer, and four deck hands, who had been aloft at the moment of boarding. These six Easterling spared for the present because he accounted that they might prove useful.

Whilst his men were busy in the shrouds about the urgent business of disentangling and where necessary repairing, the buccaneer captain began upon the person of Don Ildefonso the investigation of his capture.

The Spaniard, sickly and pallid and with a lump on his brow where the pistol-butt had smitten him, sat on a locker in the handsome, roomy cabin, with pinioned wrists, but striving, nevertheless, to preserve the haughty demeanour proper to a gentleman of Castile in the presence of an impudent sea-robber. Thus, until Easterling, towering over him, savagely threatened to loosen his tongue by the artless persuasions of torture. Then Don Ildefonso, realizing the futility of resistance, curtly answered the pirate's questions. From these answers and his subsequent investigations, Easterling discovered his capture to exceed every hope he could have formed. There had fallen into his hands Ñ which of late had known so little luck Ñ one of those prizes which had been the dream of every sea-rover since the days of Francis Drake. The Santa Barbara was a treasurer-ship from Porto Bello, laden with gold and silver which had been conveyed across the Isthmus from Panama. She had put forth under the escort of three strong ships of war, with intent to call at San Domingo to revictual before crossing to Spain. But in the recent storm which had swept the Caribbean she had been separated from her consorts, and with damaged mainmast had been driven through the Mona Passage by the gale. She had been beating back for San Domingo in the hope of rejoining there her escort or else awaiting there another fleet for Spain.

The treasure in her hold was computed by Easterling, when his gleaming eyes came to consider those ingots, at between two and three hundred thousand pieces of eight. It was a prize such as does not come the way of a pirate twice in his career, and it meant fortune for himself and those who sailed with him.

Now the possession of fortune is inevitably attended by anxiety, and Easterling's besetting anxiety at the moment was to convey his prize with all possible speed to the security of Tortuga.

From his own sloop he took two score men to form a prize crew for the Spaniard, and himself remained aboard her because he could not suffer himself to be parted from the treasure. Then, with damage hurriedly repaired, the two ships went about, and started upon their voyage. Progress was slow, the wind being none too favourable and the Santa Barbara none too manageable, and it was past noon before they had Cape Raphael once more abeam. Easterling was uneasy in this near proximity to Hispaniola, and was for taking a wide sweep that would carry them well out to sea when from the crow's nest of the Santa Barbara came a hail, and a moment later the object first espied by the lookout was visible to them all.

There, rounding Cape Raphael, not two miles away, and steering almost to meet them, came a great red ship under full sail. Easterling's telescope confirmed at once what the naked eye had led him incredulously to suspect. This vessel was the Cinco Llagas, the original object of his pursuit, which in his haste he must have outsailed.

The truth was that, overtaken by the storm as they approached Samana, Jeremy Pitt, who navigated the Cinco Llagas, had run for the shelter of Samana Bay, and under the lee of a headland had remained snug and unperceived to come forth again when the gale had spent itself.

Easterling, caring little how the thing had happened, perceived in this sudden and unexpected appearance of the Cinco Llagas a sign that Fortune, hitherto so niggardly, was disposed now to overwhelm him with her favours. Let him convey himself and the Santa Barbara's treasure aboard that stout red ship, and in strength he could make good speed home.

Against a vessel so heavily armed and so undermanned as the Cinco Llagas there could be no question of any but boarding tactics, and it did not seem to Captain Easterling that this should offer much difficulty to the swifter and more easily handled Bonaventure, commanded by a man experienced in seamanship and opposed by a lubberly follower who was by trade a surgeon.

So Easterling signalled Chard to be about the easy business, and Chard, eager enough to square accounts with

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the man who once already had done them the injury of slipping like water through their fingers, put the helm over and ordered his men to their stations.

Captain Blood, summoned from the cabin by Pitt, mounted the poop, and telescope in hand surveyed the activities aboard his old friend the *Bonaventure*. He remained in no doubt of their significance. He might be a surgeon, but hardly a lubberly one as Chard so rashly judged him. His service under de Ruyter, in those earlier adventurous days when medicine was neglected by him, had taught him more of fighting tactics than Easterling had ever known. He was not perturbed. He would show these pirates how he had profited by the lessons learnt under that great admiral.

Just as for the *Bonaventure* it was essential to employ boarding tactics, so for the *Cinco Llagas* it was vital to depend on gunfire. For with no more than, twenty men in all, she could not face the odds of almost ten to one, as Blood computed them, of a hand-to-hand engagement. So now he ordered Pitt to put down the helm, and, keeping as close to the wind as possible, to steer a course that would bring them on to the *Bonaventure's* quarter. To the main deck below he ordered Ogle, that sometime gunner of the King's Navy, taking for his gun crew all but six of the hands who would be required for work above.

Chard perceived at once the aim of the manoeuvre and swore through his teeth, for Blood had the weather gauge of him. He was further handicapped by the fact that, since the *Cinco Llagas* was to be captured for their own purposes, it must be no part of his work to cripple her by gunfire before attempting to board. Moreover, he perceived the risk to himself of the attempt, resulting from the longer range and heavier calibre of the guns of the *Cinco Llagas*, if she were resolutely handled. And there appeared to be no lack of resolution about her present master.

Meanwhile, the distance between the ships was rapidly lessening, and Chard realized that unless he acted quickly he would be within range with his flank exposed. Unable to bring his ship any closer to the wind, he went about on a south-easterly course with intent to circle widely and so get to windward of the *Cinco Llagas*.

Easterling, watching the manoeuvre from the deck of the *Santa Barbara*, and not quite understanding its purpose, cursed Chard for a fool. He cursed him the more virulently when he saw the *Cinco Llagas* veer suddenly to larboard and follow as if giving chase. Chard, however, welcomed this, and taking in sail allowed the other to draw closer. Then, with all canvas spread once more, the *Bonaventure* was off with the wind on her quarter to attempt her circling movement.

Blood understood, and took in sail in his turn, standing so that as the *Bonaventure* turned north she must offer him her flank within range of his heavy guns. Hence Chard, to avoid this, must put up his helm and run south once more.

Easterling watched the two ships sailing away from him in a succession of such manoeuvres for position, and purple with rage demanded of Heaven and Hell whether he could believe his eyes, which told him only that Chard was running away from the lubberly leech. Chard, however, was far from any such intention. With masterly patience and self-control he awaited his chance to run in and grapple. And with equal patience and doggedness Blood saw to it that he should be given no such chance.

In the end it became a question of who should commit the first blunder, and it was Chard who committed it. In his almost excessive anxiety to avoid coming broadside on with the *Cinco Llagas*, he forgot the chasers on her beak-head, and at last in playing for position allowed her to come too near. He realized his blunder when those two guns roared suddenly behind him and the shot went tearing through his shrouds. It angered him, and in his anger he replied with his stern chasers; but their inferior calibre left their fire ineffective. Then, utterly enraged, he swung the *Bonaventure* about, so as to put a broadside athwart the hawse of the other, and by crippling her sailing powers lay her at the mercy of his boarders.

The heavy groundswell, however, combined with the length of the range utterly to defeat his object, and his broadside thundered forth in impotence to leave a cloud of smoke between himself and the *Cinco Llagas*. Instantly Blood swung broadside on, and emptied his twenty larboard guns into that smoke cloud, hoping to attain the *Bonaventure's* exposed flank beyond. The attempt was equally unsuccessful, but it served to show Chard the mettle of the man he was engaging, a man with whom it was not safe to take such chances. Nevertheless, one more chance he took, and went briskly about, so as to charge through the billowing smoke, and so bear down upon the other ship before she could suspect the design. The manoeuvre, however, was too protracted for success. By the time the *Bonaventure* was upon her fresh course, the smoke had dispersed sufficiently to betray her tactics

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to Blood, and the Cinco Llagas, lying well over to larboard, was ripping through the water at twice the speed of the Bonaventure now ill-served by the wind.

Again Chard put the helm over and raced to intercept the other and to get to windward of her. But Blood, now a mile away, and with a safety margin of time, went about and returned so as to bring his starboard guns to bear at the proper moment. To elude this, Chard once more headed south and presented no more than his counter as a target.

In this manner the two vessels worked gradually away until the Santa Barbara, with the raging, blaspheming Easterling aboard, was no more than a speck on the northern horizon; and still they were as far as ever from joining battle.

Chard cursed the wind which favoured Captain Blood, and cursed Captain Blood who knew so well how to take and maintain the advantage of his position. The lubberly surgeon appeared possessed of perfect understanding of the situation and uncannily ready to meet each move of his opponent. Occasional shots continued to be exchanged by the chasers of each vessel, each aiming high so as to damage the other's sailing powers, yet, at the long range separating them, without success.

Peter Blood at the poop rail, in a fine back-and-breast and cap of black damascened steel, which had been the property of the original Spanish commander of the Cinco Llagas, was growing weary and anxious. To Hagthorpe similarly armed beside him, to Wolverstone whom no armour aboard would fit, and to Pitt at the whipstaff, immediately below, he confessed it in the tone of his question:

"How long can this ducking and dodging continue? And however long it continues what end can it have but one? Sooner or later the wind will drop or veer, or else it's ourselves will drop from sheer weariness. When that happens, we'll be at that scoundrel's mercy."

"There's always the unexpected," said young Pitt.

"Why, so there is, and I thank you for reminding me of it, Jerry. Let's put our hopes in it, for all that I can't see whence it's to come."

It was coming at that moment and coming quickly, although Blood was the only one of them who recognized it when he saw it. They were standing in towards the land at the end of a long westerly run, when round the point of Espada, less than a mile away, a towering, heavily armed ship came sailing as close to the wind as she dared, her ports open and the mouths of a score of guns gaping along her larboard flank, the banner of Castile flapping aloft in the breeze.

At sight of this fresh enemy of another sort, Wolverstone loosed an oath that sounded like a groan.

"And that's the end of us!" he cried.

"I'm by no means sure, now, that it may not be the beginning," Blood answered him, with something that sounded like laughter in his voice, which when last heard had been jaded and dispirited. And his orders, flowing fast, showed clearly what was in his mind. "Run me the flag of Spain aloft, and bid Ogle empty his chasers at the Bonaventure as we go about."

As Pitt put the helm over, and, with straining cordage and creaking blocks the Cinco Llagas swung slowly round, the gold and scarlet banner of Castile broke bravely from her main truck. An instant later the two guns on her forecastle thundered forth, ineffectually in one way but very effectually in another. Their fire conveyed very plainly to the Spanish newcomer that here he beheld a compatriot ship in pursuit of an English rover.

Explanations, no doubt, must follow, especially if upon the discovery of the identity of the Cinco Llagas the Spaniards should happen to be already acquainted with her recent history. But that could not come until they had disposed of the Bonaventure, and Blood was more than content to let the future take care of itself.

Meanwhile, the Spanish ship, a guarda-costa from San Domingo, which whilst on patrol had been attracted beyond the Point of Espada by the sound of gunfire out at sea, behaved precisely as was to be expected. Even without the flag now floating at her masthead, the Spanish origin of the Cinco Llagas was plain to read in the lines of her; that she was engaged with this equally obvious English sloop was no less plain. The guarda-costa went into the fight without a moment's hesitation and loosed a broadside at the Bonaventure as she was in the act of going about to escape this sudden and unforeseen peril.

Chard raged like a madman as the sloop shuddered under blows at stem and stern and her shattered bowsprit hung in a tangle of cordage athwart her bows. In his frenzy he ordered the fire to be returned, and did some damage to the guarda-costa, but not of a kind to impair her mobility. The Spaniard, warming to the battle, went

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about so as to pound the sloop with her starboard guns, and Chard, having lost his head by now, swung round also so as to return or even anticipate that fire.

Not until he had done so did it occur to him that with empty guns he was helplessly vulnerable to an onslaught from the Cinco Llagas. For Blood, too, espying the opportunity whilst yet it was shaping, had gone about, drawn level, and hurled at him the contents of his heavy artillery. That broadside at comparatively short range swept his deck, shattered the windows of the coach, and one well-placed shot opened a wound in the bows of the Bonaventure almost on the waterline, through which the sea rushed into the hold at every roll of the crippled vessel.

Chard realized that he was doomed, and his bitterness was deepened by perception of the misapprehension at the root of his destruction. He saw the Spanish flag at the masthead of the Cinco Llagas, and grinned in livid malice.

On a last inspiration, he struck his colours in token of surrender. It was his forlorn hope that the guarda-costa, accepting this, and ignorant of his strength in men, would rush in to grapple him, in which case he would turn the tables on the Spaniards and, possessing himself of the guarda-costa, might yet come out of the adventure with safety and credit.

But the vigilant Captain Blood guessed if not the intention at least the possibility, as well as the alternative possibility of explanations dangerous to himself from the captured Chard to the Spanish commander. To provide against either danger, he sent for Ogle, and under his instructions that skilful gunner crashed a thirty-two-pound shot into the Bonaventure's waterline amidships, so as to supplement the leakage already occurring forward.

The captain of the guarda-costa may have wondered why his compatriot should continue to fire upon a ship that had struck her colours, but the circumstance would hardly seem to him suspicious, although it might be vexatious, for its consequence appeared to be the inevitable destruction of a vessel which might yet have been turned to account.

As for Chard, he had no time for speculations of any kind. The Bonaventure was now making water so fast that his only hope of saving the lives of himself and his men lay in attempting to run her aground before she sank. So he headed her for the shoals at the foot of the Point of Espada, thanking God that she might now run before the wind, although at an ominously diminishing speed, despite the fact that the buccaneers heaved their cannon overboard to lighten her as they went. She grounded at last in the shallows, with the seas breaking over her stern- and fore-castles which alone remained above water. These and the shrouds were now black with the men who had climbed to safety. The guarda-costa stood off with idly flapping sails, waiting, her captain wondering to behold the Cinco Llagas half a mile away already heading northwards.

Aboard her presently, Captain Blood was inquiring of Pitt if a knowledge of Spanish signals was included in his lore of the sea, and if so would he read the signals that the guarda-costa was flying. The young shipmaster confessed that it was not, and expressed the opinion that as a consequence they had but escaped the frying-pan to fall into the fire.

"Now here's a lack of faith in Madam Fortune," said Blood. "We'll just be dipping our flag in salute to them, to imply that we've business elsewhere, and be off to attend to it. We look like honest Spaniards. Even through a telescope in this Spanish armour, Hagthorpe and I must look like a pair of dons. Let's go and see how it's faring with the ingenious Easterling. I'm thinking the time has come to improve our acquaintance with him."

The guarda-costa, if surprised at the unceremonious departure of the vessel she had assisted in the destruction of that pirate sloop, cannot have suspected her bona-fides. Either taking it for granted that she had business elsewhere, or else because too intent upon making prisoners of the crew of the Bonaventure, she made no attempt to follow.

And so it fell out that some two hours later, Captain Easterling, waiting off the coast between Cape Raphael and Cape Engano, beheld to his stupefaction and horror the swift approach of Peter Blood's red ship. He had listened attentively and in some uneasiness to the distant cannonade, but he had assumed its cessation to mean that the Cinco Llagas was taken. The sight now of that frigate, sailing briskly, jauntily, and undamaged, defied belief. What had happened to Chard? There was no sign of him upon the sea. Could he have blundered so badly as to have allowed Captain Blood to sink him?

Speculation on this point was presently quenched by speculation of an infinitely graver character. What might be this damned doctor-convict's present intention? If Easterling had been in case to board him, he would have

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known no apprehension, for even his prize crew on the Santa Barbara outnumbered Blood's men by more than two to one. But the crippled Santa Barbara could never be laid board and board with the Cinco Llagas unless Blood desired it, and if Blood meant mischief as a result of what had happened with the Bonaventure, the Santa Barbara must lie at the mercy of his guns.

The reflection, vexatious enough in itself, was maddening to Easterling when he considered what he carried under hatches. Fortune, it now began to seem, had not favoured him at all. She had merely mocked him by allowing him to grasp something which he could not hold.

But this was by no means the end of his vexation.

For now, as if the circumstances in themselves had not been enough to enrage a man, his prize crew turned mutinous. Led by a scoundrel named Gunning, a man almost as massive and ruthless as Easterling himself, they furiously blamed their captain and his excessive and improvident greed for the peril in which they found themselves, a peril of death or capture embittered by the thought of the wealth they held. With such a prize in his hands, Easterling should have taken no risks. He should have kept the Bonaventure at hand for protection and paid no heed to the empty hulk of the Cinco Llagas. This they told him in terms of fiercest vituperation, whose very justice left him without answer other than insults, which he liberally supplied.

Whilst they wrangled, the Cinco Llagas drew nearer, and now Easterling's quartermaster called his attention to the signals she was flying. These demanded the immediate presence aboard her of the commander of the Santa Barbara.

Easterling was taken with panic. The high colour receded from his cheeks, his heavy lips grew purple. He vowed that he would see Doctor Blood in hell before he went.

His men assured him that they would see him in hell, and shortly, if he did not go.

Gunning reminded him that Blood could not possibly know what the Santa Barbara carried, and that therefore it should be possible to cozen him into allowing her to go her ways without further molestation.

A gun thundered from the Cinco Llagas, to send a warning shot across the bows of the Santa Barbara. That was enough. Gunning thrust the quartermaster aside, and himself seized the helm and put it over, so that the ship lay hove to, as a first intimation of compliance. After that the buccaneers launched the cockboat and a half-dozen of them swarmed down to man her, whilst, almost at pistol-point, Gunning compelled Captain Easterling to follow them.

When presently he climbed into the waist of the Cinco Llagas where she lay hove to, a cable's length away across the sunlit waters, there was hell in his eyes and terror in his soul. Straight and tall, in Spanish corselet and headpiece, the despised doctor stood forward to receive him. Behind him stood Hagthorpe and a half-score of his followers. He seemed to smile.

"At last, Captain, ye stand where ye have so long hoped to stand: on the deck of the Cinco Llagas."

Easterling grunted ragefully for only answer to this raillery. His great hands twitched as if he would have them at his Irish mocker's throat. Captain Blood continued to address him.

"It's an ill thing, Captain, to attempt to grasp more than you can comfortably hold. Ye'll not be the first to find himself empty-handed as a consequence. That was a fine fast-sailing sloop of yours, the Bonaventure. Ye should have been content. It's a pity that she'll sail no more; for she's sunk, or will be entirely at high water." Abruptly he asked: "How many hands are with you?" and he had to repeat the question before he was sullenly answered that forty men remained aboard the Santa Barbara.

"What boats does she carry?"

"Three with the cock-boat."

"That should be enough to accommodate your following. Ye'll order them into those boats at once if you value their lives, for in fifteen minutes from now I shall open fire on the ship and sink her. This because I can spare no men for a prize crew, nor can I leave her afloat to be repossessed by you and turned to further mischief."

Easterling began a furious protest that was mixed with remonstrances of the peril to him and his of landing on Hispaniola. Blood cropped it short.

"Ye're receiving such mercy as you probably never showed to any whom ye compelled to surrender. Ye'd best profit by my tenderness. If the Spaniards, on Hispaniola spare you when you land there, you can get back to your hunting and boucanning, for which ye're better fitted than the sea. Away with you now."

But Easterling did not at once depart. He stood with feet planted wide, swaying on his powerful legs,

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clenching and unclenching his hands. At last he took his decision.

"Leave me that ship, and in Tortuga, when I get there, I'll pay you fifty thousand pieces of eight. That's better nor the empty satisfaction of turning us adrift."

"Away with you!" was all that Blood answered him, his tone more peremptory.

"A hundred thousand!" cried Easterling.

"Why not a million?" wondered Blood. "It's as easily promised, and the promise as easily broken. Oh, I'm like to take your word, Captain Easterling, as like as I am to believe that ye command such a sum as a hundred thousand pieces of eight."

Easterling's baleful eyes narrowed. Behind his black beard his thick lips tightened. Almost they smiled. Since there was nothing to be done without disclosures, nothing should be done at all. Let Blood sink a treasure which in any case must now be lost to Easterling. There was in the thought a certain bitter negative satisfaction.

"I pray that we may meet again, Captain Blood," he said, falsely, grimly unctuous. "I'll have something to tell you then that'll make you sorry for what you do now."

"If we meet again, I've no doubt the occasion will be one for many regrets. Good-day to you, Captain Easterling. Ye've just fifteen minutes, ye'll remember."

Easterling sneered and shrugged, and then abruptly turned and climbed down to the rocking boat that awaited him below.

When he came to announce Blood's message to his buccaneers, they stormed and raged so fiercely at the prospect of thus being cheated of everything that they could be heard across the water aboard the Cinco Llagas, to the faintly scornful amusement of Blood, who was far from suspecting the true reason of all this hubbub.

He watched the lowering of the boats, and was thereafter amazed to see the decks of the Santa Barbara empty of that angry, vociferous mob. The buccaneers had gone below before leaving, each man intent upon taking as much of the treasure as he could carry upon his person. Captain Blood became impatient.

"Pass the word down to Ogle to put a shot into her fore-castle. Those rogues need quickening."

The roar of the gun, and the impact of the twenty-four-pound shot as it smashed through the timbers of the high forward structure, brought the buccaneers swarming upon deck again and thence to the waiting boats with the speed of fear. Yet a certain order they preserved for their safety's sake, for in the sea that was running, the capsizing of a boat would have been an easy matter.

They pushed off; their wet oars flashed in the sunlight, and they began to draw away towards the promontory not more than two miles to windward. Once they were clear, Blood gave the word to open fire, when Hagthorpe clutched his arm.

"Wait, man! Wait! Look! There's someone still aboard her."

Surprised, Blood looked, first with his naked eye, then through his telescope. He beheld a bareheaded gentleman in corselet and thigh-boots, who clearly was no buccaneer of the kind that sailed with Easterling, and who stood on the poop frantically waving a scarf. Blood was quick to guess his identity.

"It'll be one of the Spaniards who were aboard when Easterling took the ship and whose throat he forgot to cut."

He ordered a boat to be launched and sent six men with Dyke, who had some knowledge of Spanish, to bring the Spaniard off:

Don Ildefonso, who, callously left to drown in the doomed ship, had worked himself free of the thong that bound his wrists, stood in the forechains to await the coming of that boat. He was quivering with excitement at this deliverance of himself and the vessel in his charge with her precious freight; a deliverance which he regarded as little short of miraculous. For like the guarda-costa, Don Ildefonso, even if he had not recognized the Spanish lines of this great ship which had come so unexpectedly to the rescue, must have been relieved of all doubt by the flag of Spain which had been allowed to remain floating at the masthead of the Cinco Llagas.

So with speech bubbling eagerly out of him in that joyous excitement of his, the Spanish commander poured into the ears of Dyke, when the boat brought up alongside, the tale of what had happened to them and what they carried. Because of this, it was necessary that they should lend him a dozen men so that with the six now under hatches on the Santa Barbara he might bring his precious cargo safely into San Domingo.

To Dyke this was an amazing and exciting narrative. But he did not on that account lose grip of his self-possession. Lest too much Spanish should betray him to Don Ildefonso, he took refuge in curtness.

THE TREASURE SHIP

"Bueno," said he. "I'll inform my captain." Under his breath he ordered his men to push off and head back for the Cinco Llagas.

When Blood heard the tale and had digested his amazement, he laughed.

"So this is what that rogue would have told me if ever we met again. "Faith, it's a satisfaction to be denied him."

Ten minutes later the Cinco Llagas lay board and board with the Santa Barbara.

In the distance Easterling and his men, observing the operation, rested on their oars to stare and mutter. They saw themselves cheated of even the meagre satisfaction for which they had looked in the sinking of an unsuspected treasure. Easterling burst into fresh profanity.

"It'll be that damned Spaniard I forgot in the cabin who'll ha' blabbed of the gold. Oh, 'sdeath! This is what comes o' being soft-hearted. If only I'd cut his throat now . . ."

Meanwhile, to Don Ildefonso, who had been able to make nothing of this boarding manoeuvre, Captain Blood, save for the light eyes in his bronzed face, looking every inch a Spaniard, and delivering himself in the impeccable Castilian of which he was master, was offering explanations.

He was unable to spare a crew to man the Santa Barbara, for his own following was insufficient. Nor dared he leave her afloat, since in that case she would be repossessed by the abominable pirates whom he had constrained to abandon her. It remained, therefore, before scuttling her only to transship the treasure with which Don Ildefonso informed him she was laden. At the same time he would be happy to offer Don Ildefonso and his six surviving hands the hospitality of the Cinco Llagas as far as Tortuga, or, if Don Ildefonso preferred it, as seemed probable, Captain Blood would seize a favourable moment for allowing them to take one of his boats and land themselves upon the coast of Hispaniola.

Now this speech was the most amazing thing that had yet happened to Don Ildefonso in that day of amazements.

"Tortuga!" he exclaimed. "Tortuga! You sail to Tortuga, do you say? But what to do there? In God's name, who are you, then? What are you?"

"As for who I am, I am called Peter Blood. As for what I am, faith, I scarce know myself."

"You are English!" cried the Spaniard in sudden horror of partial understanding.

"Ah, no. That, at least, I am not." Captain Blood drew himself up with great dignity. "I have the honour to be Irish."

"Ah, bah! Irish or English, it is all one."

"Indeed and it is not. There's all the difference in the world between the two."

The Spaniard looked at him with angry eyes. His face was livid, his mouth scornful. "English or Irish, the truth is you are just a cursed pirate."

Blood looked wistful. He fetched a sigh. "I'm afraid you are right," he admitted. "It's a thing I've sought to avoid. But what am I to do now, when Fate thrusts it upon me in 'thisfashion, and insists that I make so excellent a beginning?"