



## CHAPTER I

### HOW MR. OXENHAM SAW THE WHITE BIRD

The hollow oak our palace is,  
Our heritage the sea.

ALL who have travelled through the delicious scenery of North Devon must needs know the little white town of Bideford, which slopes upwards from its broad tide-river paved with yellow sands, and many-arched old bridge where salmon wait for autumn floods, toward the pleasant upland on the west. Above the town the hills close in, cushioned with deep oak woods, through which juts here and there a crag of fern-fringed slate; below they lower, and open more and more in softly-rounded knolls, and fertile squares of red and green, till they sink into the wide expanse of hazy flats, rich salt-marshes, and rolling sand-hills, where Torridge joins her sister Taw, and both together flow quietly toward the broad surges of the bar, and the everlasting thunder of the long Atlantic swell. Pleasantly the old town stands there, beneath its soft Italian sky, fanned day and night by the fresh ocean breeze, which forbids alike the keen winter frosts, and the fierce summer heats of the midland; and pleasantly it has stood there for now, perhaps, eight hundred years, since the first Grenville, cousin of the Conqueror, returning from the conquest of South Wales, drew round

him trusty Saxon serfs, and free Norse rovers with their golden curls, and dark Silurian Britons from the Swansea shore, and all the mingled blood which still gives to the seaward folk of the next county their strength and intellect, and, even in these levelling days, their peculiar beauty of face and form.<sup>c</sup>

But at the time whereof I write, Bideford was not merely a pleasant country town, whose quay was haunted by a few coasting craft. It was one of the chief ports of England; it furnished seven ships to fight the Armada: even more than a century afterwards, say the chroniclers, 'it sent more vessels to the northern trade than any port in England, saving (strange juxtaposition!) London and Topsham,' and was the centre of a local civilisation and enterprise, small perhaps compared with the vast efforts of the present day: but who dare despise the day of small things, if it has proved to be the dawn of mighty ones? And it is to the sea-life and labour of Bideford, and Dartmouth, and Topsham, and Plymouth (then a petty place), and many another little western town, that England owes the foundation of her naval and commercial glory. It was the men of Devon, the Drakes and Hawkins', Gilberts and Raleighs, Grenvilles and Oxenhams, and a host more of 'forgotten worthies,' whom we shall learn one day to honour as they deserve, to whom she owes her commerce, her colonies, her very existence. For had they not first crippled, by their West Indian raids, the ill-gotten resources of the Spaniard, and then crushed his last huge effort in Britain's Salamis, the glorious fight of 1588, what had we been by now, but a Popish appanage of a world-tyranny as cruel as heathen Rome itself, and far more devilish?

It is in memory of these men, their voyages and their battles, their faith and their valour, their heroic lives and no less heroic deaths, that I write this book; and if now and then I shall seem to warm into a style somewhat too stilted and pompous, let me be excused for my subject's sake, fit rather to have been sung than said, and to have proclaimed to all true English hearts, not as a novel but as an epic

(which some man may yet gird himself to write), the same great message which the songs of Troy, and the Persian wars, and the trophies of Marathon and Salamis, spoke to the hearts of all true Creeks of old.

One bright summer's afternoon, in the year of grace 1575, a tall and fair boy came lingering along Bideford quay, in his scholar's gown, with satchel and slate in hand, watching wistfully the shipping and the sailors, till, just after he had passed the bottom of the High Street, he came opposite to one of the many taverns which looked out upon the river. In the open bay-window sat merchants and gentlemen, discoursing over their afternoon's draught of sack; and outside the door was gathered a group of sailors, listening earnestly to some one who stood in the midst. The boy, all alive for any sea-news, must needs go up to them, and take his place among the sailor-lads who were peeping and whispering under the elbows of the men; and so came in for the following speech, delivered in a loud bold voice, with a strong Devonshire accent and a fair sprinkling of oaths.

'If you don't believe me, go and see, or stay here and grow all over blue mould. I tell you, as I am a gentleman, I saw it with these eyes, and so did Salvation Yeo there, through a window in the lower room, and we measured the heap, as I am a christened man, seventy foot long, ten foot broad, and twelve foot high, of silver bars, and each bar between a thirty and forty pound weight. And says Captain Drake: "There, my lads of Devon, I've brought you to the mouth of the world's treasure-house, and it's your own fault now, if you don't sweep it out as empty as a stock-fish."'

'Why didn't you bring some of they home, then, Mr. Oxenham?'

'Why weren't you there to help to carry them? We would have brought 'em away, safe enough, and young Drake and I had broke the door abroad already, but Captain Drake goes off in a dead faint; and when we came to look,

he had a wound in his leg you might have laid three fingers in, and his boots were full of blood, and had been for an hour or more; but the heart of him was that, that he never knew it till he dropped, and then his brother and I got him away to the boats, he kicking and strugg'ing, and bidding us let him go on with the fight, though every step he took in the sand was in a pool of blood; and so we got off. And tell me, ye sons of shotten herrings, wasn't it worth more to save him than the dirty silver? for silver we can get again, braver-boys: there's more fish in the sea than ever came out of it, and more silver in *Nombre de Dios* than would pave all the streets in the west country: but of such captains as Franky Drake, Heaven never makes but one at a time; and if we lose him, good-bye to England's luck, say I, and who don't agree, let him choose his weapons, and I'm his man.'

He who delivered this harangue was a tall and sturdy personage, with a florid black-bearded face, and bold restless dark eyes, who leaned, with crossed legs and arms akimbo, against the wall of the house; and seemed in the eyes of the schoolboy a very magnifico, some prince or duke at least. He was dressed (contrary to all sumptuary laws of the time) in a suit of crimson velvet, a little the worse, perhaps, for wear; by his side were a long Spanish rapier and a brace of daggers, gaudy enough about the hilts; his fingers sparkled with rings; he had two or three gold chains about his neck, and large earrings in his ears, behind one of which a red rose was stuck jauntily enough among the glossy black curls; on his head was a broad velvet Spanish hat, in which instead of a feather was fastened with a great gold clasp a whole Quezal bird, whose gorgeous plumage of fretted golden green shone like one entire precious stone. As he finished his speech, he took off the said hat, and looking at the bird in it—

'Look ye, my lads, did you ever see such a fowl as that before? That's the bird which the old Indian kings of Mexico let no one wear but their own selves; and therefore I wear it, —I, John Oxenham of South Tawton,—for a sign to all

brave lads of Devon, that as the Spaniards are the masters of the Indians, we're the masters of the Spaniards': and he replaced his hat.

A murmur of applause followed: but one hinted that he 'doubted the Spaniards were too many for them.'

'Too many? How many men did we take *Nombre de Dios* with? Seventy-three were we, and no more when we sailed out of Plymouth Sound; and before we saw the Spanish Main, half were "*gastados*," used up, as the Dons say, with the scurvy; and in Port Pheasant Captain Rouse of Cowes fell in with us, and that gave us some thirty hands more; and with that handful, my lads, only fifty-three in all, we picked the lock of the new world! And whom did we lose but our trumpeter, who stood braying like an ass in the middle of the square, instead of taking care of his neck like a Christian? I tell you, those Spaniards are rank cowards, as all bullies are. They pray to a woman, the idolatrous rascals! and no wonder they fight like women.'

'You'm right, Captain,' sang out a tall gaunt fellow who stood close to him; 'one west-countryman can fight two easterlings, and an easterling can beat three Dons any day. Eh! my lads of Devon?

For O! it's the herrings and the good brown beef,  
And the cider and the cream so white;  
O! they are the making of the jolly Devon lads,  
For to play, and eke to fight.'

'Come,' said Oxenham, 'come along! Who lists? who lists? who'll make his fortune?

Oh, who will join, jolly mariners all?  
And who will join, says he, O!  
To fill his pockets with the good red goold,  
By sailing on the sea, O!'

'Who'll list?' cried the gaunt man again; 'now's your time! We've got forty men to Plymouth now, ready to sail the minute we get back, and we want a dozen out of

you Bideford men, and just a boy or two, and then we'm off and away, and make our fortunes, or go to heaven.

Our bodies in the sea so deep,  
Our souls in heaven to rest !  
Where valiant seamen, one and all,  
Hereafter shall be blest !'

'Now,' said Oxenham, 'you won't let the Plymouth men say that the Bideford men daren't follow them? North Devon against South, it is. Who'll join? who'll join? It is but a step of the way, after all, and sailing as smooth as a duck-pond as soon as you're past Cape Finisterre. I'll run a Clovelly herring-boat there and back for a wager of twenty pound, and never ship a bucketful all the way. Who'll join? Don't think you're buying a pig in a poke. I know the road, and Salvation Yeo, here, too, who was the gunner's mate, as well as I do the narrow seas, and better. You ask him to show you the chart of it, now, and see if he don't tell you over the ruttier as well as Drake himself.'

On which the gaunt man pulled from under his arm a great white buffalo horn covered with rough etchings of land and sea, and held it up to the admiring ring.

'See here, boys all, and behold the pictur of the place, dra'ed out so natural as ever was life. I got mun from a Portingal, down to the Azores; and he'c' pricked mun out, and pricked mun out, wheresoever he'd sailed, and whatsoever he'd seen. Take mun in your hands now, Simon Evans, take mun in your hands; look mun over, and I'll warrant you'll know the way in five minutes so well as ever a shark in the seas.'

And the horn was passed from hand to hand; while Oxenham, who saw that his hearers were becoming moved, called through the open window for a great tankard of sack, and passed that from hand to hand, after the horn.

The schoolboy, who had been devouring with eyes and ears all which passed, and had contrived by this time to edge himself into the inner ring, now stood face to face with the hero of the emerald crest, and got as many peeps as he

could at the wonder. But when he saw the sailors, one after another, having turned it over a while, come forward and offer to join Mr. Oxenham, his soul burned within him for a nearer view of that wondrous horn, as magical in its effects as that of Tristrem, or the enchanter's in Ariosto; and when the group had somewhat broken up, and Oxenham was going into the tavern with his recruits, he asked boldly for a nearer sight of the marvel, which was granted at once.

And now to his astonished gaze displayed themselves cities and harbours, dragons and elephants, whales fought with sharks, plate ships of Spain, islands with apes and palm-trees, each with its name over-written, and here and there, 'Here is gold'; and again, 'Much gold and silver'; inserted most probably, as the words were in English, by the hands of Mr. Oxenham himself. Lingeringly and longingly the boy turned it round and round, and thought the owner of it more fortunate than Khan or Kaiser. Oh, if he could but possess that horn, what needed he on earth beside to make him blest!

'I say, will you sell this?'

'Yea, marry, or my own soul, if I can get the worth of it.'

'I want the horn,—I don't want your soul; it's somewhat of a stale sole, for aught I know; and there are plenty of fresh ones in the bay.'

And therewith, after much fumbling, he pulled out a tester (the only one he had), and asked if that would buy it?

'That! no, nor twenty of them.'

The boy thought over what a good knight-errant would do in such case, and then answered, 'Tell you what: I'll fight you for it.'

'Thank'ee, sir!'

'Break the jackanapes's head for him, Yeo,' said Oxenham.

'Call me jackanapes again, and I break yours, sir.' And the boy lifted his fist fiercely.

Oxenham looked at him a minute smilingly. 'Tut!;

tut! my man, hit one of your own size, if you will, and spare little folk like me!

'If I have a boy's age, sir, I have a man's fist. I shall be fifteen years old this month, and know how to answer any one who insults me.'

'Fifteen, my young cockerel? you look liker twenty,' said Oxenham, with an admiring glance at the lad's broad limbs, keen blue eyes, curling golden locks, and round honest face. 'Fifteen? If I had half a dozen such lads as you, I would make knights of them before I died. Eh, Yeo?'

'He'll do,' said Yeo; 'he will make a brave gamecock in a year or two, if he dares ruffle up so early at a tough old hen-master like the Captain.'

At which there was a general laugh, in which Oxenham joined as loudly as any, and then bade the lad tell him why he was so keen after the horn.

'Because,' said he, looking up boldly, 'I want to go to sea. I want to see the Indies. I want to fight the Spaniards. Though I am a gentleman's son, I'd a deal liever be a cabin-boy on board your ship.' And the lad, having hurried out his say fiercely enough, dropped his head again.

'And you shall,' cried Oxenham, with a great oath; 'and take a galleon, and dine off carbonadoed Dons. Whose son are you, my gallant fellow?'

'Mr. Leigh's, of Burrough Court.'

'Bless his soul! I know him as well as I do the Eddy-stone, and his kitchen too. Who sups with him to-night?'

'Sir Richard Grenvile.'

'Dick Grenvile? I did not know he was in town. Go home and tell your father John Oxenham will come and keep him company. There, off with you! I'll make all straight with the good gentleman, and you shall have your venture with me; and as for the horn, let him have the horn, Yeo, and I'll give you a noble for it.'

'Not a penny, noble Captain. If young master will take a poor mariner's gift, there it is, for the sake of his love t



the calling, and Heaven send him luck therein.' And the good fellow, with the impulsive generosity of a true sailor, thrust the horn into the boy's hands, and walked away to escape thanks.

'And now,' quoth Oxenham, 'my merry men all, make up your minds what mannered men you be minded to be before you take your bounties. I want none of your rascally arching longshore vermin, who get five pounds out of this captain, and ten out of that, and let him sail without them after all, while they are stowed away under women's mu<sup>ff</sup>lers, and in tavern cellars. If any man is of that humour, he had better to cut himself up, and salt himself down in a barrel for pork, before he meets me again; for by this light, let me catch him, be it seven years hence, and if I do not cut his throat upon the streets, it's a pity! But if any man will be true brother to me, true brother to him I'll be, come wreck or prize, storm or calm, salt water or fresh, victuals or none, share and fare alike; and here's my hand upon it, for every man and all! and so—

Westward ho! with a rumbelow,  
And hurra for the Spanish Main, O!

After which oration Mr. Oxenham swaggered into the tavern, followed by his new men; and the boy took his way homewards, nursing his precious horn, trembling between hope and fear, and blushing with maidenly shame, and a half-sense of wrong-doing at having revealed suddenly to a stranger the darling wish which he had hidden from his father and mother ever since he was ten years old.

Now this young gentleman, Amyas Leigh, though come of as good blood as any in Devon; and having lived all his life in what we should even now call the very best society, and being (on account of the valour, courtesy, and truly noble qualities which he showed forth in his most eventful life) chosen by me as the hero and centre of this story, was not, saving for his good looks, by any means what would be called nowadays an 'interesting' youth, still less a 'highly-educated' one; for with the exception of a little Latin,

which had been driven into him by repeated blows, as if it had been a nail, he knew no books whatsoever, save his Bible, his Prayer-Book, the old *Mort d'Arthur* of Caxton's edition, which lay in the great bay-window in the hall, and the translation of Las Casas's *History of the West Indies*, which lay beside it, lately done into English under the title of *The Cruelties of the Spaniards*. He devoutly believed in fairies, whom he called pixies; and held that they changed babies, and made the mushroom rings on the downs to dance in. When he had warts or burns, he went to the white witch at Northam to charm them away; he thought that the sun moved round the earth, and that the moon had some kindred with a Cheshire cheese. He held that the swallows slept all the winter at the bottom of the horse-pond; talked, like Raleigh, Grenville, and other low persons, with a broad Devonshire accent; and was in many other respects so very ignorant a youth, that any pert monitor in a national school might have had a hearty laugh at him. Nevertheless, this ignorant young savage, 'vacant of the glorious gains' of the nineteenth century, children's literature and science made easy, and, worst of all, of those improved views of English history now current among our railway essayists, which consist in believing all persons, male and female, before the year 1688, and nearly all after it, to have been either hypocrites or fools, had learnt certain things which he would hardly have been taught just now in any school in England; for his training had been that of the old Persians, 'to speak the truth and to draw the bow,' both of which savage virtues he had acquired to perfection, as well as the equally savage ones of enduring pain cheerfully and of believing it to be the finest thing in the world to be a gentleman; by which word he had been taught to understand the careful habit of causing needless pain to no human being, poor or rich, and of taking pride in giving up his own pleasure for the sake of those who were weaker than himself. Moreover, having been entrusted for the last year with the breaking of a colt, and the care of a cast of young hawks which his father had received from Lundy Isle, he had been profiting much, by

the means of those coarse and frivolous amusements, in perseverance, thoughtfulness, and the habit of keeping his temper; and though he had never had a single 'object lesson,' or been taught to 'use his intellectual powers,' he knew the names and ways of every bird, and fish, and fly, and could read, as cunningly as the oldest sailor, the meaning of every drift of cloud which crossed the heavens. Lastly, he had been for some time past, on account of his extraordinary size and strength, undisputed cock of the school, and the most terrible fighter among all Bideford boys; in which brutal habit he took much delight, and contrived, strange as it may seem, to extract from it good, not only for himself but for others, doing justice among his school-fellows with a heavy hand, and succouring the oppressed and afflicted; so that he was the terror of all the sailor-lads, and the pride and stay of all the town's boys and girls, and hardly considered that he had done his duty in his calling if he went home without beating a big lad for bullying a little one. For the rest, he never thought about thinking, or felt about feeling; and had no ambition whatsoever beyond pleasing his father and mother, getting by honest means the maximum of 'red quarrenders' and mazard cherries, and going to sea when he was big enough. Neither was he what would be nowadays called by many a pious child; for though he said his Creed and Lord's Prayer night and morning, and went to the service at the church every forenoon, and read the day's Psalms with his mother every evening, and had learnt from her and from his father (as he proved well in after life) that it was infinitely noble to do right and infinitely base to do wrong, yet (the age of children's religious books not having yet dawned on the world) he knew nothing more of theology, or of his own soul, than is contained in the Church Catechism. It is a question, however, on the whole, whether, though grossly ignorant (according to our modern notions) in science and religion, he was altogether untrained in manhood, virtue, and godliness; and whether the barbaric narrowness of his information was not somewhat counterbalanced both in him

and in the rest of his generation by the depth, and breadth, and healthiness of his Education.

So let us watch him up the hill as he goes hugging his horn, to tell all that has passed to his mother, from whom he had never hidden anything in his life, save only that sea-fever; and that only because he foreknew that it would give her pain; and because, moreover, being a prudent and sensible lad, he knew that he was not yet old enough to go, and that, as he expressed it to her that afternoon, 'there was no use hollaing till he was out of the wood.'

So he goes up between the rich lane-banks, heavy with drooping ferns and honeysuckle; out upon the windy down toward the old Court, nestled amid its ring of wind-clipt oaks; through the grey gateway into the homeclose; and then he pauses a moment to look around; first at the wide bay to the westward, with its southern wall of purple cliffs; then at the dim Isle of Lundy far away at sea; then at the cliffs and downs of Morte and Braunton, right in front of him; then at the vast yellow sheet of rolling sand-hill, and green alluvial plain dotted with red cattle, at his feet, through which the silver estuary winds onward toward the sea. Beneath him, on his right, the Torridge, like a land-locked lake, sleeps broad and bright between the old park of Tapeley and the charmed rock of the Hubbastone, where, seven hundred years ago, the Norse rovers landed to lay siege to Kenwith Castle, a mile away on his left hand; and not three fields away, are the old stones of 'The Bloody Corner,' where the retreating Danes, cut off from their ships, made their last fruitless stand against the Saxon sheriff and the valiant men of Devon. Within that charmed rock, so Torridge boatmen tell, sleeps now the old Norse Viking in his leaden coffin, with all his fairy treasure and his crown of gold; and as the boy looks at the spot, he fancies, and almost hopes, that the day may come when he shall have to do his duty against the invader as boldly as the men of Devon did then. And past him, far below, upon the soft south-eastern breeze, the stately ships go sliding out to sea. When shall he sail in them, and see the wonders of the deep? And as

he stands there with beating heart and kindling eye, the cool breeze whistling through his long fair curls, he is a symbol, though he knows it not, of brave young England longing to wing its way out of its island prison, to discover and to traffic, to colorise and to civilise, until no wind can sweep the earth which does not bear the echoes of an English voice. Patience, young Amyas! Thou too shalt forth, and westward ho, beyond thy wildest dreams; and see brave sights, and do brave deeds, which no man has since the foundation of the world. Thou too shalt face invaders stronger and more cruel far than Dane or Norman, and bear thy part in that great Titan strife before the renown of which the name of Salamis shall fade away!

Mr. Oxenham came that evening to supper as he had promised: but as people supped in those days in much the same manner as they do now, we may drop the thread of the story for a few hours, and take it up again after supper is over.

‘Come now, Dick Grenvile, do thou talk the good man round, and I’ll warrant myself to talk round the good wife.’

The personage whom Oxenham addressed thus familiarly answered by a somewhat sarcastic smile, and, ‘Mr. Oxenham gives Dick Grenvile’ (with just enough emphasis on the ‘Mr.’ and the ‘Dick,’ to hint that a liberty had been taken with him) ‘overmuch credit with the men. Mr. Oxenham’s credit with fair ladies, none can doubt. Friend Leigh, is Heard’s great ship home yet from the Straits?’

The speaker, known well in those days as Sir Richard Grenvile, Granville, Grenvil, Greenfield, with two or three other variations, was one of those truly heroic personages whom Providence, fitting always the men to their age and their work, had sent upon the earth whereof it takes right good care, not in England only, but in Spain and Italy, in Germany and the Netherlands, and wherever, in short, great men and great deeds were needed to lift the mediæval world into the modern.

And, among all the heroic faces which the painters of that age have preserved, none, perhaps, hardly excepting,

Shakspeare's or Spenser's, Alva's or Parma's, is more heroic than that of Richard Grenville, as it stands in Prince's *Worthies of Devon*; of a Spanish type, perhaps (or more truly speaking, a Cornish), rather than an English, with just enough of the British element in it to give delicacy to its massiveness. The forehead and whole brain are of extraordinary loftiness, and perfectly upright; the nose long, aquiline, and delicately pointed; the mouth fringed with a short silky beard, small and ripe, yet firm as granite, with just pout enough of the lower lip to give hint of that capacity of noble indignation which lay hid under its usual courtly calm and sweetness; if there be a defect in the face, it is that the eyes are somewhat small, and close together, and the eyebrows, though delicately arched, and without a trace of peevishness, too closely pressed down upon them; the complexion is dark, the figure tall and graceful; altogether the likeness of a wise and gallant gentleman, lovely to all good men, awful to all bad men; in whose presence none dare say or do a mean or a ribald thing; whom brave men left, feeling themselves nerved to do their duty better, while cowards slipped away, as bats and owls before the sun. So he lived and moved, whether in the Court of Elizabeth, giving his counsel among the wisest; or in the streets of Bideford, capped alike by squire and merchant, shopkeeper and sailor; or riding along the moorland roads between his houses of Stow and Bideford, while every woman ran out to her door to look at the great Sir Richard, the pride of North Devon; or, sitting there in the low mullioned window at Burrough, with his cup of malmsey before him, and the lute to which he had just been singing laid across his knees, while the red western sun streamed in upon his high, bland forehead, and soft curling locks; ever the same steadfast, God-fearing, chivalrous man, conscious (as far as a soul so healthy could be conscious) of the pride of beauty, and strength, and valour, and wisdom, and a race and name which claimed direct descent from the grandfather of the Conqueror, and was tracked down the centuries by valiant deeds and noble benefits to his native shire, himself the noblest of his race.

Men said that he was proud : but he could not look round him without having something to be proud of ; that he was stern and harsh to his sailors : but it was only when he saw in them any taint of cowardice or falsehood ; that he was subject, at moments, to such fearful fits of rage, that he had been seen to snatch the glasses from the table, grind them to pieces in his teeth, and swallow them : but that was only when his indignation had been aroused by some tale of cruelty or oppression ; and, above all, by those West Indian devilries of the Spaniards whom he regarded (and in those days rightly enough) as the enemies of God and man. Of this last fact Oxenham was well aware, and therefore felt somewhat puzzled and nettled, when, after having asked Mr. Leigh's leave to take young Amyas with him, and set forth in glowing colours the purpose of his voyage, he found Sir Richard utterly unwilling to help him with his suit.

'Heyday, Sir Richard ! You are not surely gone over to the side of those canting fellows (Spanish Jesuits in disguise, every one of them, they are), who pretended to turn up their noses at Franky Drake as a pirate, and be hanged to them ?'

'My friend Oxenham,' answered he in the sententious and measured style of the day, 'I have always held, as you should know by this, that Mr. Drake's booty, as well as my good friend Captain Hawkins's, is lawful prize, as being taken from the Spaniard, who is not only "hostis humani generis," but has no right to the same, having robbed it violently, by torture and extreme iniquity, from the poor Indian, whom God avenge, as He surely will.'

'Amen,' said Mrs. Leigh.

'I say Amen too,' quoth Oxenham, 'especially if it please Him to avenge them by English hands.'

'And I also,' went on Sir Richard ; 'for the rightful owners of the said goods being either miserably dead, or incapable by reason of their servitude, of ever recovering any share thereof, the treasure, falsely called Spanish, cannot be better bestowed than in building up the state of England against them, our natural enemies ; and thereby, in building

up the weal of the Reformed Churches throughout the world, and the liberties of all nations, against a tyranny more foul and rapacious than that of Nero or Caligula; which, if it be not the cause of God, I, for one, know not what God's cause is!' And, as he warmed in his speech, his eyes flashed very fire.

'Hark now!' said Oxenham, 'who can speak more boldly than he? and yet he will not help this lad to so noble an adventure.'

'You have asked his father and mother; what is their answer?'

'Mine is this,' said Mr. Leigh; 'if it be God's will that my boy should become, hereafter, such a mariner as Sir Richard Grenvile, let him go, and God be with him; but let him first bide here at home and be trained, if God give me grace, to become such a gentleman as Sir Richard Grenvile.'

Sir Richard bowed low, and Mrs. Leigh catching up the last word—

'There, Mr. Oxenham, you cannot gainsay that, unless you will be discourteous to his worship. And for me—though it be a weak woman's reason, yet it is a mother's: he is my only child. His elder brother is far away. God only knows whether I shall see him again; and what are all reports of his virtues and his learning to me, compared to that sweet presence which I daily miss? Ah! Mr. Oxenham, my beautiful Joseph is gone; and though he be lord of Pharaoh's household, yet he is far away in Egypt; and you will take Benjamin also! Ah! Mr. Oxenham, you have no child, or you would not ask for mine!'

'And how do you know that, my sweet Madam?' said the adventurer, turning first deadly pale, and then glowing red. Her last words had touched him to the quick in some unexpected place; and rising, he courteously laid her hand to his lips, and said—'I say no more. Farewell, sweet Madam, and God send all men such wives as you.'

'And all wives,' said she, smiling, 'such husbands as mine.'



'Nay, I will not say that,' answered he, with a half sneer—and then, 'Farewell, friend Leigh—farewell, gallant Dick Grenville. God send I see thee Lord High Admiral when I come home. And yet, why should I come home? Will you pray for poor Jack, gentles?'

'Tut, tut, man! good words,' said Leigh; 'let us drink to our merry meeting before you go.' And rising, and putting the tankard of malmsey to his lips, he passed it to Sir Richard, who rose, and saying, 'To the fortune of a bold mariner and a gallant gentleman,' drank, and put the cup into Oxenham's hand.

The adventurer's face was flushed, and his eye wild. Whether from the liquor he had drunk during the day, or whether from Mrs. Leigh's last speech, he had not been himself for a few minutes. He lifted the cup, and was in act to pledge them, when he suddenly dropped it on the table, and pointed, staring and trembling, up and down, and round the room, as if following some fluttering object.

'There! Do you see it? The bird!—the bird with the white breast!'

Each looked at the other; but Leigh, who was a quick-witted man and an old courtier, forced a laugh instantly, and cried—

'Nonsense, brave Jack Oxenham! Leave white birds for men who will show the white feather. Mrs. Leigh waits to pledge you.'

Oxenham recovered himself in a moment, pledged them all round, drinking deep and fiercely; and after hearty farewells, departed, never hinting again at his strange exclamation.

After he was gone, and while Leigh was attending him to the door, Mrs. Leigh and Grenville kept a few minutes' dead silence. At last—

'God help him!' said she.

'Amen!' said Grenville, 'for he never needed it more. But indeed, Madam, I put no faith in such omens.'

'But, Sir Richard, that bird has been seen for generations before the death of any of his family. I know those who,

were at South Tawton when his mother died, and his brother also ; and they both saw it. God help him ! for, after all, he is a proper man.'

'So many a lady has thought before now, Mrs. Leigh, and well for him if they had not. But, indeed, I make no account of omens. When God is ready for each man, then he must go ; and when can he go better ?'

'But,' said Mr. Leigh, who entered, 'I have seen, and especially when I was in Italy, omens and prophecies before now bet get their own fulfilment, by driving men into recklessness, and making them run headlong upon that very ruin which, as they fancied, was running upon them.'

'And which,' said Sir Richard, 'they might have avoided, if, instead of trusting in I know not what dumb and dark destiny, they had trusted in the living God, by faith in whom men may remove mountains, and quench the fire, and put to flight the armies of the alien. I, too, know, and know not how I know, that I shall never die in my bed.'

'God forfend !' cried Mrs. Leigh.

'And why, fair Madam, if I die doing my duty to my God and my queen ? The thought never moves me : nay, to tell the truth, I pray often enough that I may be spared the miseries of imbecile old age, and that end which the old Northmen rightly called "a cow's death" rather than a man's. But enough of this. Mr. Leigh, you have done wisely to-night. Poor Oxenham does not go on his voyage with a single eye. I have talked about him with Drake and Hawkins ; and I guess why Mrs. Leigh touched him so home when she told him that he had no child.'

'Has he one, then, in the West Indies ?' cried the good lady.

'God knows ; and God grant we may not hear of shame and sorrow fallen upon an ancient and honourable house of Devon. My brother Stukely is woe enough to North Devon for this generation.'

'Poor braggadocio !' said Mr. Leigh ; 'and yet not altogether that too, for he can fight at least.'

'So can every mastiff and boar, much more an English-

man. And now come hither to me, my adventurous godson, and don't look in such doleful dumps. I hear you have broken all the sailor-boys' heads already.'

'Nearly all,' said young Amyas, with due modesty. 'But am I not to go to sea?'

'All things in their time, my boy, and God forbid that either I or your worthy parents should keep you from that noble calling which is the safeguard of this England and her queen. But you do not wish to live and die the master of a trawler?'

'I should like to be a brave adventurer, like Mr. Oxenham.'

'God grant you become a braver man than he! for as I think, to be bold against the enemy is common to the brutes; but the prerogative of a man is to be bold against himself.'

'How, sir?'

'To conquer our own fancies, Amyas, and our own lusts, and our ambition, in the sacred name of duty; this it is to be truly brave, and truly strong; for he who cannot rule himself, how can he rule his crew or his fortunes? Come, now, I will make you a promise. If you will bide quietly at home and learn from your father and mother all which befits a gentleman and a Christian, as well as a seaman, the day shall come when you shall sail with Richard Grenville himself, or with better men than he, on a nobler errand than gold-hunting on the Spanish Main.'

'O my boy, my boy!' said Mrs. Leigh, 'hear what the good Sir Richard promises you. Many an earl's son would be glad to be in your place.'

'And many an earl's son will be glad to be in his place a score years hence, if he will but learn what I know you two can teach him. And now, Amyas, my lad, I will tell you for a warning the history of that Sir Thomas Stukely of whom I spoke just now, and who was, as all men know, a gallant and courtly knight, of an ancient and worshipful family in Ilfracombe, well practised in the wars, and well beloved at first by our incomparable queen, the friend of all

true virtue, as I trust she will be of yours some day ; who wanted but one step to greatness, and that was this, that in his hurry to rule all the world, he forgot to rule himself. At first, he wasted his estate in snow and luxury, always intending to be famous, and destroying his own fame all the while by his vainglory and haste. Then, to retrieve his losses, he hit upon the peopling of Florida, which thou and I will see done some day, by God's blessing ; for I and some good friends of mine have an errand there as well as he. But he did not go about it as a loyal man, to advance the honour of his queen, but his own honour only, dreaming that he too should be a king ; and was not ashamed to tell her Majesty that he had rather be sovereign of a molehill than the highest subject of an emperor.'

'They say,' said Mr. Leigh, 'that he told her plainly he should be a prince before he died, and that she gave him one of her pretty quips in return.

'I don't know that her Majesty had the best of it. A fool is many times too strong for a wise man, by virtue of his thick hide. For when she said that she hoped she should hear from him in his new principality, "Yes sooth," says he, graciously enough. "And in what style?" asks she. "To our dear sister," says Stukely: to which her clemency had nothing to reply, but turned away, as Mr. Burleigh told me, laughing.'

'Alas for him!' said gentle Mrs. Leigh. 'Such self-conceit—and Heaven knows we have the root of it in ourselves also—is the very daughter of self-will, and of that loud crying out about I, and me, and mine, which is the very bird-call for all devils, and the broad road which leads to death.'

'It will lead him to his,' said Sir Richard ; 'God grant it be not upon Tower-hill ! for since that Florida plot, and after that his hopes of Irish preferment came to nought, he who could not help himself by fair means has taken to foul ones, and gone over to Italy to the Pope, whose infallibility has not been proof against Stukely's wit ; for he was soon his Holiness's closet counsellor, and, they say, his bosom

friend ; and made him give credit to his boasts that, with three thousand soldiers he would beat the English out of Ireland, and make the Pope's son king of it.'

'Ay, but,' said Mr. Leigh, 'I suppose the Italians have the same fetch now as they had when I was there, to explain such ugly cases; namely, that the Pope is infallible only in doctrine, and quoad Pope; while quoad hominem, he is even as others, or indeed, in general, a deal worse, so that the office, and not the man, may be glorified thereby. But where is Stukely now?'

'At Rome when last I heard of him, ruffling it up and down the Vatican as Baron Ross, Viscount Murrrough, Earl Wexford, Marquis Leinster, and a title or two more, which have cost the Pope little, seeing that they never were his to give; and plotting, they say, some hare-brained expedition against Ireland by the help of the Spanish king, which must end in nothing but his shame and ruin. And now, my sweet hosts, I must call for serving-boy and lantern, and home to my bed in Bideford.'

And so Amyas Leigh went back to school, and Mr. Oxenham went his way to Plymouth again, and sailed for the Spanish Main.

