

# **THE WAR INDEMNITY**

Rafael Sabatini



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# THE WAR INDEMNITY

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IF it was incredibly gallant, it was no less incredibly I foolish of the *Atrevida* to have meddled with the *Arabella*, considering the Spaniard's inferior armament and the orders under which she sailed.

The *Arabella* was that *Cinco Llagas* out of Cadiz of which Peter Blood had so gallantly possessed himself. He had so renamed her in honour of a lady in Barbadoes whose memory was ever to serve him as an inspiration and to set restraint upon his activities as a buccaneer. She was going westward in haste to overtake her consorts, which were a full day ahead, and was looking neither to right nor to left when somewhere about 19 degrees of Northern latitude and 66 of Western longitude, the *Atrevida* espied her, turned aside to steer across her course, and opened the attack by a shot athwart her hawse.

The Spaniard's commander, Don Vicente de Casanegra, was actuated by a belief in himself that was tempered by no consciousness of his limitations.

The result was precisely what might have been expected. The *Arabella* went promptly about on a southern tack which presently brought her on to the *Atrevida*'s windward quarter, thus scoring the first tactical advantage. Thence, whilst still out of range of the Spaniard's sakers, the *Arabella* poured in a crippling fire from her demi-cannons, which went far towards deciding the business. At closer quarters she followed this up with cross-bar and langrel, and so cut and slashed the *Atrevida*'s rigging that she could no longer have fled, even had Don Vicente been prudently disposed to do so. Finally within pistol-range the *Arabella* hammered her with a broadside that converted the trim Spanish frigate into a staggering, impotent hulk. When, after that, they grappled, the Spaniards avoided death by surrender, and it was to Captain Blood himself that the grey-faced, mortified Don Vicente delivered up his sword.

"This will teach you not to bark at me when I am passing peacefully by," said Captain Blood. "I see that you call yourself the *Atrevida*. But it's more impudent than daring I'm accounting you."

His opinion was even lower when, in the course of investigating his capture, he found among the ship's papers a letter from the Spanish Admiral, Don Miguel de Espinosa y Valdez, containing Don Vicente's sailing orders. In these he was instructed to join the Admiral's squadron with all speed at Spanish Key off Bieque, for the purpose of a raid upon the English settlement of Antigua. Don Miguel was conveniently expressive in his letter.

"Although," he wrote, "his Catholic Majesty is at peace with England, yet England makes no endeavour to repress the damnable activities of the pirate Blood in Spanish waters. Therefore, it becomes necessary to make reprisals and obtain compensation for all that Spain has suffered at the hands of this indemoniated filibuster."

Having stowed the disarmed Spaniards under hatches — all save the rash Don Vicente, who, under parole, was taken aboard the *Arabella* — Blood put a prize crew into the *Atrevida*, patched up her wounds, and set a south-easterly course for the passage between Anegada and the Virgin Islands.

He explained the changed intentions which this implied at a council held that evening in the great cabin and attended by Wolverstone, his lieutenant, Pitt, his shipmaster, Ogle, who commanded on the main-deck, and two representatives of the main body of his followers, one of whom, Albin, was a Frenchman. This because one third of the buccaneers aboard the *Arabella* at the time were French.

He met with some opposition when he announced the intention of making for Antigua.

This opposition was epitomized by Wolverstone, who banged the table with a fist that was like a ham, before delivering himself. "To hell with King James and all who serve him! It's enough that we never make war upon English ships or English settlements. But I'll be damned if I account it our duty to protect folk whose hands are against us."

Captain Blood explained. "The impending Spanish raid is in the nature of reprisals for damage suffered by Spaniards at our hands. This seems to me to impose a duty upon us. We may not be patriots, as ye say,

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Wolverstone and we may not be altruists. If we go to warn and remain to assist, we do so as mercenaries, whose services are to be paid for by a garrison which should be very glad to hire them. Thus we reconcile duty with profit."

By these arguments he prevailed.

At dawn, having negotiated the passage, they hove to with the southernmost point of the Virgen Gorda on their starboard quarter, some four miles away. The sea being calm, Captain Blood ordered the boats of the *Atrevida* to be launched, and her Spanish crew to depart in them, whereafter the two ships proceeded on their way to the Leeward Islands.

Going south of Saba with gentle breezes, they were off the west coast of Antigua on the morning of the next day, and with the Union Jack flying from the maintruck they came to cast anchor in ten fathoms on the north side of the shoal that divides the entrance to Fort Bay.

A few minutes after noon, just as Colonel Courtney, the Captain-General of the Leeward Islands, whose seat of government was in Antigua, was sitting down to dinner with Mrs. Courtney and Captain Macartney, he was astounded by the announcement that Captain Blood had landed at Saint John's, and desired to wait upon him.

Colonel Courtney, a tall, dried-up man of forty-five, sandy and freckled, stared with pale, red-rimmed eyes at Mr. Ives, his young secretary, who had brought the message. "Captain Blood, did you say? Captain Blood? What Captain Blood? Surely not the damned pirate of that name, the gallows-bird from Barbadoes?"

Mr. Ives permitted himself to smile upon his Excellency's excitement. "The same, sir."

Colonel Courtney flung his napkin amid the dishes on the spread table, and rose, still incredulous. "And he's here? Here? Is he mad? Has the sun touched him? Stab me, I'll have him in irons for his impudence before I dine, and on his way to England before . . ." He broke off. "Egad!" he cried, and swung to his second in command. "We'd better have him in, Macartney."

Macartney's round face, as red as his coat, showed an amazement no less than the Governor's. That a rascal with a price on his head should have the impudence to pay a morning call on the governor of an English settlement was something that left Captain Macartney almost speechless and more incapable of thought than usual.

Mr. Ives admitted into the long, cool, sparsely furnished room, a tall, spare gentleman, very elegant in a suit of biscuit-coloured taffetas. A diamond of price gleamed amid the choice lace at his throat, a diamond buckle flashed from the band of the plumed hat he carried, a long pear-shaped pearl hung from his left ear and glowed against the black curls of his periwig. He leaned upon a gold-mounted ebony cane. So unlike a buccaneer was this modish gentleman that they stared in silence into the long, lean, sardonic countenance with its high-bridged nose and eyes that looked startlingly blue and cold in a face that was burnt to the colour of a red Indian's. More and more incredulous the Colonel brought out a question with a jerk.

"You are Captain Blood?"

The gentleman bowed. Captain Macartney gasped and desired his vitals to be stabbed. The Colonel said "Egad!" again, and his pale eyes bulged. He looked at his pallid wife, at Macartney, and then again at Captain Blood. "You're a daring rogue. A daring rogue, egad!"

"I see you've heard of me."

"But not enough to credit this. Ye'll not have come to surrender?"

The buccaneer sauntered forward to the table. Instinctively Macartney rose.

"If you'll be reading this it will save a world of explanations." And he laid before his Excellency the letter from the Spanish Admiral. "The fortune of war brought it into my hands together with the gentleman to whom it is addressed."

Colonel Courtney read, changed colour, and handed the sheet to Macartney. Then he stared again at Blood, who spoke as if answering the stare.

"It's here to warn you I am, and at need to serve you."

"To serve me?"

"Ye seem in need of it. Your ridiculous fort will not stand an hour under Spanish gunfire, and after that you'll have these gentlemen of Castile in the town. Maybe you know how they conduct themselves on these occasions. If not, I'll be after telling you."

"But — stab me!" spluttered Macartney — "we're not at war with Spain."

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Colonel Courtney turned in cold fury upon Blood. "It is you who are the author of all our woes. It is your rascalities which bring these reprisals upon us."

"That's why I've come. Although I think I am a pretext rather than a reason." Captain Blood sat down. "You've been finding gold in Antigua, as I've heard. Don Miguel will have heard it too. Your militia garrison is not two hundred strong, and your fort, as I've said, is so much rubbish. I bring you a strong ship very heavily armed, and two hundred of the toughest fighting—men to be found in the Caribbean, or anywhere in the world. Of course I'm a damned pirate, and there's a price on my head, and if ye're fastidiously scrupulous ye'll have nothing to say to me. But if ye've any sense, as I hope ye have, it's thanking God ye'll be that I've come, and ye'll make terms with me."

"Terms?"

Captain Blood explained himself. His men did not risk their lives for the honour and glory of it, and there were in his following a number who were French, and who therefore lacked all patriotic feeling where a British colony was concerned. They would expect a trifle for the valuable services they were about to render.

"Also, Colonel," Blood concluded, "there's a point of honour for you. Whilst it may be difficult for you to enter into alliance with us, there's no difficulty about hiring us, and you may pursue us again without scruple once this job is done."

The Governor looked at him with gloomy eyes. "If I did my duty I would have you in irons and send you home to England to be hanged."

Captain Blood was unperturbed. "Your immediate duty is to preserve the colony of which ye're governor. Ye'll perceive its danger. And the danger is so imminent that even moments may count. Ye'd do well, faith, not to be wasting them."

The Governor looked at Macartney. Macartney's face was as blank as his mind. Then the lady, who had sat a scared and silent witness, suddenly stood up. Like her husband she was tall and angular, and a tropical climate had prematurely aged her and consumed her beauty. Apparently, thought Blood, it had not consumed her reason.

"James, how can you hesitate? Think of what will happen to the women — the women and the children — if these Spaniards land. Remember what they did at Bridgetown."

The Governor stood with his chin upon his breast, frowning gloomily. "Yet I cannot enter into alliance with . . . I cannot make terms with outlaws. My duty here is clear. Quite clear." There was finality in his tone.

"Fiat officium, ruat coelum," said the classical-minded Blood. He sighed, and rose. "If that's your last word, I'll be wishing you a very good day. I've no mind to be caught unawares by the Caribbean squadron."

"You don't leave," said the Colonel sharply. "There, too, my duty is clear. The guard, Macartney."

"Och, don't be a fool now, Colonel." Blood's gesture arrested Macartney.

"I'm not a fool, sir, and I know what becomes me. I must do my duty."

"And is your duty demanding so scurvy a return for the valuable service I've already rendered you by my warning? Give it thought now, Colonel."

Again the Colonel's lady acted as Blood's advocate, and acted passionately in her clear apprehension of the only really material issue.

Exasperated, the Colonel flung himself down into his chair again. "But I cannot. I will not make terms with a rebel, an outlaw, a pirate. The dignity of my office . . . I . . . I cannot."

In his heart Captain Blood cursed the stupidity of governments that sent such men as this to represent them overseas.

"Will the dignity of your office restrain the Spanish Admiral, d'ye suppose?"

"And the women, James!" his lady again reminded him. "Surely, James, in this extreme need — a whole squadron coming to attack you — his Majesty must approve your enlisting any aid."

Thus she began and thus continued, and now Macartney was moved to alliance with her against his Excellency's narrow stubbornness, until in the end the Captain-General was brought to sacrifice dignity to expediency. Still reluctant he demanded ill-humouredly to know the terms of the buccaneers.

"For myself," said Blood, "I ask nothing. I will organize your defences for the sake of the blood in my veins. But when the Spaniards have been driven off, I shall require a hundred pieces of eight for each of my men. I have two hundred of them."

His Excellency was scandalized. "Twenty thousand pieces!" He choked, and so far forgot his dignity as to haggle. But Blood was coldly firm, and in the end the price was agreed.

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That afternoon he set to work upon the defences of Saint John's.

Fort Bay is an inlet some two miles in depth and a mile across its widest part. It narrows a little at the mouth, forming a slight bottle-neck. In the middle of this neck ran a long, narrow spit of sand, partly uncovered at extreme low water, with a channel on either side. The southern channel was safe only for vessels of shallow draught; in the narrow, northern channel, however, at the entrance to which the Arabella now rode at anchor, there was never less than eight fathoms, at times slightly increased by the small tides of this sea, so that this was the only gateway to the bay. The fort guarded this channel, occupying a shallow eminence on the northern promontory. It was a square, squat, machicolated structure of grey stone, and its armament consisted of a dozen ancient sakers and a half-dozen faucons with an extreme range of two thousand yards, guns these which provoked Captain Blood's contempt. He supplemented them by twelve sakers of more modern fashion, which he brought ashore from the Atrevida.

Twelve more guns he landed from the Spanish ship, including two twelve-pounders. These, however, he reserved for another purpose. Fifty yards west of the fort on the extreme edge of the promontory he set about the construction of earthworks, and set about it at a rate which allowed Colonel Courtney some insight into buccaneer methods and the secret of their success.

He landed a hundred of his men for the purpose and had them toiling almost naked in the broiling sun. To these he added three hundred whites and as many Negroes from Saint John's — practically the whole of its efficient male population — and he had them digging, banking, and filling the wickerwork gabions into the making of which he impressed the women. Others were sent to cut turf and fell trees, and fetch one and the other to the site of these operations. Throughout the afternoon the promontory seethed and crawled like an ant-heap. By sunset all was done. It seemed a miracle to the Captain-General. In six hours, under Blood's direction and the drive of his will, another fort had been constructed which by ordinary methods could not have been built in less than a week. And it was not only built and armed with the remaining twelve guns brought from the Atrevida and with a half-dozen powerful demicannons landed from the Arabella, it was so effectively dissembled that from the sea no suspicion of its existence could be formed. Strips of turf faced it so that it merged into the background of shallow cliff; cocoanut palms topped it and rose about it, clumps of white acacia and arnotto trees masked the gun emplacements so effectively as to render them invisible at half a mile.

Colonel Courtney conceived that here was a deal of wasted labour. Why trouble to conceal fortifications whose display should have the effect of deterring an assailant?

Blood explained. "If he's intimidated, he'll merely be postponing attack until some time when I'm not here to defend you. I mean either to destroy him or so to maul him that he'll be glad to leave British settlements alone in future."

That night Blood slept aboard the Arabella at her anchorage under the bluff. In the morning Saint John's was awakened and alarmed by the sound of heavy gunfire. The Captain-General ran from his house in a bed-gown, conceiving that the Spaniards were already here. The firing, however, proceeded from the new earthworks, and was directed upon the completely dismayed hull of the Atrevida which had been anchored fore and aft athwart the narrow fairway, right in the middle of the channel.

The Captain-General dressed in haste, took horse and rode out to the bluff with Macartney. As he reached it, the firing ceased. The hulk, riddled with shot, was slowly settling down. She sank with a gurgle, as the now furious Governor flung himself from his horse beside the earthworks. Of Captain Blood, who with a knot of his rude followers was observing the end of the Atrevida, he stormily demanded to know in the name of Heaven and of Hell what folly this might be. Did Captain Blood realize that he had completely blocked the entrance to the harbour for all but vessels of the lightest draught?

"That was the aim," said Blood. "I've been at pains to find the shallowest part of the channel. She lies in six fathoms, reducing the depth to a bare two."

The Captain-General conceived that he was being mocked. Livid, he demanded why so insane a measure should have been taken, and this without consulting him. With a note of weariness in his voice, Captain Blood explained what should have been obvious. It gave some pause to the Governor's anger. Yet the suspicions natural to a man of such limited vision were not quieted.

"But if to sink the hulk there was your only object, why in the devil's name did you waste shot and powder on her? Why didn't you scuttle her?"



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Blood shrugged. "A little gunnery practice. We accomplished two objects in one."

"Gunnery practice?" His Excellency was savage. "At that range? What are you telling me, man?"

"You'll understand better when Don Miguel arrives."

"I'll understand now, if you please. I will so! Stab me! Ye'll observe that I command here in Antigua."

Blood was annoyed. He had never learnt to suffer fools gladly. "Faith, then your command outstrips your understanding if my object isn't plain. Meanwhile, there are some other matters yet to be settled, and time may be short." With that he swung on his heel, and left the Captain-General spluttering.

Blood had surveyed the coast, and found a snug inlet known as Willoughby's Cove, not two miles away, where the *Arabella* could lie concealed and yet so conveniently at hand that he and all his men might remain aboard. This at least was good news to Colonel Courtney, who was in dread of having pirates quartered on the town. Blood demanded that his men should be victualled, and required fifty head of cattle and twenty hogs. The Captain-General would have haggled with him, but was overborne in terms which did not improve their relations. The beasts were duly delivered and in the days that followed the buccaneers became buccaneers in earnest; the boucan fires were lighted on the shores of Willoughby's Cove, and there the flesh of the slaughtered animals was boucanned together with a quantity of turtle which the adventurers captured thereabouts.

In these peaceful arts three days were consumed, until the Captain-General began to ask himself if the whole thing were not some evil game to cover nefarious ends of Captain Blood and his pirates. Blood, however, explained the delay. Not until Don Miguel had abandoned hope of being joined by Don Vicente de Casanegra with the *Atrevida* would he decide to sail without him.

Another four days of inactivity went by, on each of which the Captain-General rode out to Willoughby's Cove to vent his suspicions in searching questions. The interviews increased daily in acrimony. Daily Blood expressed more and more plainly to the Captain-General that he saw little hope for the colonial future of a country which exercised so little discrimination in the election of her overseas governors.

Don Miguel's squadron appeared off Antigua only just in time to avert an open rupture between the Captain-General and his buccaneer ally.

Word being brought of this to Willoughby's Cove, early one Monday morning by one of the guards left in charge of the earthworks, Captain Blood landed a hundred of his men, and marched them across to the bluff. Wolverstone was left in command aboard. Ogle, that formidable gunner, was already quartered at the fort with a gun-crew.

Six miles out at sea standing directly for the harbour of Saint John's, with a freshening breeze from the northwest to temper the increasing heat of the morning sun, came four stately ships under full spread of sail, the banner of Castile afloat from the head of each mainmast.

From the parapet of the old fort Captain Blood surveyed them through his telescope. At his elbow, with Macartney in attendance, stood the Captain-General perceiving at last that the Spanish menace was a reality.

Don Miguel commanded at the time the *Virgen del Pilar*, the finest and most powerful vessel in which he had yet sailed since Blood had sunk the *Milagrosa* some months before. She was a great black-hulled galleon of forty guns, including in her armament several heavy demi-cannon with a range of three thousand yards. Of the other three ships, two, if inferior, were still formidable thirty-gun frigates, whilst the last was really little better than a sloop of ten guns.

Blood closed his telescope and prepared for action in the old fort. The new one was for the moment left inactive.

Within a half-hour battle was joined. Don Miguel's advance had all the rashness which Blood knew of old.

He made no attempt to shorten sail until within two thousand yards. He conceived, no doubt, that he was taking the place entirely unawares, and that the antiquated guns of the fort would probably be inadequate. Nevertheless, he must dispose of them before attempting to enter the harbour. To be sure of making short work of it, he continued to advance until Blood computed him within a thousand yards.

"On my soul," said Blood, "he'll be meaning to get within pistol-range, or else he thinks the fort of no account at all. Wake him up, Ogle. Let him have a salute."

Ogle's crew had been carefully laying their guns, and they had followed the advance with the twelve sakers from the *Atrevida*. Others stood at hand with linstocks, rammers, and water-tubs, to serve the gunners.

Ogle gave the word, and the twelve guns were touched off as one, with a deafening roar. Within that easy

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range even the five-pound shot of these comparatively small cannon did some little damage to two of the Spanish ships. The moral effect of thus surprising those who came to surprise was even greater. The Admiral instantly signalled them to go about. In doing so they poured broadside after broadside into the fort, and for some minutes the place was a volcano, smoke and dust rising in a dense column above the flying stones and crumbling masonry. Blinded by it the buccaneers had no vision of what the Spaniards might be doing. But Blood guessed it, and cleared every man from the fort into shelter behind it during the brief respite before the second broadsides came. When that was over, he drove them back again into the battered fortress, which for a while now had nothing more to fear, and the original antiquated guns of Saint John's were brought into action. The faucons were fired at random through the cloud of dust that hid them merely as a display and to let the Spaniards know that the fort was still alive. Then, as the cloud lifted, the five-pounders spoke, in twos and threes, carefully aimed at the ships which were now beating to windward. They did little damage; but this was less important than to keep the Spaniards in play.

Meanwhile, the gun-crews were busy with the sakers from the *Atrevida*. Water-tubs had been emptied over them, and now with swabs and wads and rammers at work the reloading was proceeding.

The Captain-General, idle amid this terrific activity, required presently to know why powder was so ineffectively being wasted by these pop-guns, when in the earthworks there were cannon of long range which might be hammering the Spaniards with twenty-four and thirty-pound shot. When he was answered evasively, he passed from suggestion to command, whereupon he was invited not to interfere with carefully laid plans.

An altercation was saved by the return of the Spaniards to the attack and a repetition of all that had gone before. Again the fort was smashed and pounded, and this time two Negroes were killed and a half-dozen buccaneers were injured by flying masonry, despite Blood's precaution to get them out of the place before the broadsides came.

When the second attack had been beaten off and the Spaniards were again retiring to reload, Blood resolved to withdraw the guns from a fort in which another half-dozen broadsides might completely bury them. Negroes and buccaneers and men of the Antiguan militia were indiscriminately employed on the business and harnessed to the guns. Even so it took an hour to get them all clear of the rubble and emplaced anew on the landward side of the fort, where Ogle and his men proceeded once more to load and carefully to lay them. The body of the fort meanwhile served to screen the operation from the Spaniards as they sailed in for the third time. Now the English held their fire whilst another storm of metal crashed upon those battered but empty ramparts. When it was over, the fort was a shapeless heap of rubble, and the little army lying concealed behind the ruins heard the Spanish cheer that announced their conviction that all was done, since no single shot had been fired to answer their bombardment.

Proudly, confidently, Don Miguel came on. No need now to stand off to reload. Already the afternoon was well advanced and he would house his men in Saint John's before nightfall. The haze of dust and smoke, whilst serving to screen the defenders and their new emplacements from the sight of the enemy, could yet be penetrated at close quarters by the watchful eyes of the buccaneers. The *Virgen del Pilar* was within five hundred yards of the harbour's mouth, when six sakers, charged now with langrel, chain, and cross-bar, swept her decks with murderous effect and some damage to her shrouds. Six faucons, similarly charged, followed after a moment's pause, and, if their fire was less effective, it yet served to increase the confusion and the alarm of so unexpected an attack.

In the pause they could hear the blare of a trumpet aboard the *Virgen*, screeching the Admiral's orders to the other ships of his squadron. Then, as in the haste of their manoeuvre to go about, the Spaniards yawed a moment, broadside on, Blood gave the signal, and two by two the remaining sakers sent their five-pound round shot in search of Spanish timbers. Odd ones took effect, and one very fortunate cannon-ball smashed the mainmast of one of the frigates. In her crippled state and the desperate haste resulting from it, she fouled the sloop, and before the two vessels could disentangle themselves and follow the retreat of the others, their decks had been raked again and again by langrel and cross-bar from water-cooled and hurriedly reloaded guns.

Blood, who had been crouching with the rest, stood up at last as the firing ceased, its work temporarily accomplished. He looked into the long, solemn face of Colonel Courtney, and laughed.

"Faith! It's another slaughter of the innocents, so it is."

The Captain-General smiled sourly back at him. "If you had done as I desired you . . ."

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Blood interrupted without ceremony. "On my soul, now! Are ye not content? If I'd done as you desired me, I'd have put all my cards on the table by now. It's saving my trumps I am until the Admiral plays as I want him to."

"And if the Admiral doesn't, Captain Blood?"

"He will, for one thing because it's in the nature of him; for another because there's no other way to play at all. And so ye may go home and sleep in peace, placing your trust in Providence and me."

"I do not care for the association, sir," said the Governor frostily.

"But ye will. On my soul, ye will. For we do fine things when we work together, Providence and I."

An hour before sunset the Spaniards were hove to a couple of miles out at sea, and becalmed. The Antiguans, white and black, dismissed by Blood, went home to sup, all but some two score whom he retained for emergencies. Then his buccaneers sat down under the sky to a generous supply of meat and a limited amount of rum.

The sun went down into the jade waters of the Caribbean, and darkness followed almost as upon the extinction of a lamp, the soft, purple darkness of a moonless night irradiated by a myriad stars.

Captain Blood stood up and nosed the air. The north-westerly breeze, which had died down towards evening, was springing up again. He ordered all fires and lights to be extinguished, so as to encourage that for which he hoped.

Out at sea in the fine cabin of the *Virgen del Pilar*, the proud, noble, brave, incompetent Admiral of the Caribbean held a council of war which was no council; for he had summoned his captains merely so that he might impose his will upon them. At dead midnight, by when all in Saint John's should be asleep, in the conviction that no further attack would come until morning, they would creep past the fort under cover of darkness and with all lights extinguished. Daylight should find them at anchor a mile or more beyond it, in the bay, with their guns trained upon the town. That must be checkmate to the Antiguans.

Upon this they acted, and with sails trimmed to the favouring breeze, and shortened so as to lessen the gurgle of water at their prows, they nosed gently forward through the velvety gloom. With the *Virgen* leading, they reached the entrance of the harbour and the darker waters between the shadowy bluffs on either side. Here all was deathly still. Not a light showed save the distant phosphorescent line where the waters met the shore; not a sound disturbed the stillness save the silken rustle of the sea against their sides. Already within two hundred yards of the fort, and of the spot where the *Atrevida* had been sunk to block the channel, the *Virgen* crept on, her bulwarks lined with silent, watchful men, Don Miguel, leaning immovable as a statue upon the poop-rail. He was abreast of the fort and counting the victory already won, when suddenly his keel grated, and, grating ever harder, drove shuddering onwards for some yards, to be finally gripped and held as if by some monstrous hand in the depths below, whilst overhead under pressure of a wind to which the vessel no longer yielded, the sails drummed loudly to an accompaniment of groaning cordage and clattering blocks.

And then, before the Admiral could even conjecture what had happened to him, the gloom to larboard was split by flame, the silence smashed by a roar of guns, the rending of timbers, and the crashing fall of spars, as the demi-cannons landed from the *Arabella* and held in reserve until now in the dissembled earthworks, hurled their thirty-two-pound shot into the Spanish flagship at merciless short range. The deadly accuracy of these guns might have revealed to Colonel Courtney precisely why Captain Blood had elected to sink the *Atrevida* by gunfire, instead of scuttling her. Thus he had obtained the exact range which enabled him to fire so accurately through the darkness. One frantic, wildly aimed broadside the *Virgen* discharged in answer before, smashed and riddled and held above water only by the hulk on which she had stuck fast, the Admiral abandoned her. With his survivors he clambered aboard one of the frigates, the *Indiana*, which, unable to check her way in time, had crashed into him astern. Moving very slowly, the *Indiana* had suffered little damage beyond a smashed bowsprit, and her captain, acting promptly, had taken in what little sail he carried.

Mercifully at that moment the guns ashore were reloading. In that brief respite the *Indiana* received the fugitives from the flagship, whilst the sloop, which had been next in line, perceiving the situation, took in all sail at once, and getting out her sweeps, warped the *Indiana* astern from her entanglement, and out into the open, where the other frigate lay hove to firing desultorily in the direction of the now silent earthworks on the bluff. The only effect of this was to betray her whereabouts to the buccaneers, and presently the demicannons were roaring again, though no longer collectively. A shot from one of them completed the crippling of the *Indiana* by smashing her rudder; so that having been warped out of the harbour she had to be taken in tow by her sister ship.

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The firing ceased on both sides, and the peace and silence of the tropical night would again have descended on Saint John's but that all in the town were now afoot and hastening out to the bluff for information.

When daylight broke, the only ship on the blue expanse of the Caribbean within the vision of Antigua was the red-hulled Arabella at anchor in the shadow of the bluff to receive the demi-cannons she had lent the enterprise, and the battered Virgen del Pilar listing heavily to starboard where she had stuck on the submerged hull of the Atrevida. About the wrecked flagship swarmed a fleet of small boats and canoes in which the buccaneers were salvaging every object of value to be found aboard her. They brought all ashore: arms and armour, some of great price, a service of gold plate, vessels of gold and silver, two steelbound coffers, being presumably the treasury of the squadron and containing some six thousand pieces of eight, besides jewels, clothes, Oriental carpets, and rich brocades from the great cabin. All were piled up beside the fort for subsequent division as provided by the articles under which the buccaneers sailed.

A string of four pack-mules came along the shallow cliff as the salvaging was concluded, and drew up beside the precious heap.

"What's this?" quoth Blood, who was present at the spot.

"From his Excellency the Captain-General," replied the Negro muleteer, "fo' dah conveying ob dah treasure."

Blood was taken aback. When he recovered, "Much obliged," said he, and ordered the mules to be laden, and conducted to the end of the bluff, to the boats which were to carry the spoils aboard the Arabella.

After that he went to wait upon the Captain-General.

He was shown into a long, narrow room from one end of which a portrait of his late sardonic majesty King Charles II looked into a mirror on the other. There was a long, narrow table on which stood some books, a guitar, a bowl of heavily scented white acacia, and there were some tall-backed chairs of black oak without upholstery.

The Captain-General came in followed by Macartney. His face looked longer and narrower than ever.

Captain Blood, telescope under his arm and plumed hat in his hand, bowed low.

"I come to take my leave, your Excellency."

"I was about to send for you." The Colonel's pale eyes sought to meet the Captain's steady gaze, but failed. "I hear of considerable treasure taken from the Spanish wreck. I am told you men have carried this aboard your ship. You are aware, sir — or are you not? — that these spoils are the property of the King."

"I am not aware of it," said Captain Blood.

"You are not? Then I inform you of it now."

Captain Blood shook his head, smiling tolerantly. "It is a prize of war."

"Exactly. And the war was being waged on behalf of his Majesty and in defence of this his Majesty's colony."

"Save that I did not hold the King's commission."

"Tacitly, and temporarily, I granted it you when I consented to enlist you and your men in the defence of the island."

Blood stared at him in amused astonishment. "What were you, sir, before they made you Captain-General of the Leeward Islands? A lawyer?"

"Captain Blood, I think you mean to be insolent."

"You may be sure I do, and more. You consented to enlist me, did you? Here's condescension! Where should you be now if I hadn't brought you the assistance you consented to receive?"

"We will take one thing at a time, if you please." The Colonel was coldly prim. "When you entered the service of King James, you became subject to the laws that govern his forces. Your appropriation of treasure from the Spanish flagship is an act of brigandage contrary to all those laws and severely punishable under them."

Captain Blood found the situation increasingly humorous. He laughed.

"My clear duty," added Colonel Courtney, "is to place you under arrest."

"But I hope you're not thinking of performing it?"

"Not if you choose to take advantage of my leniency, and depart at once."

"I'll depart as soon as I receive the twenty thousand pieces of eight for which I hired you my services."

"You have chosen, sir, to take payment in another fashion. You have committed a breach of the law. I have nothing more to say to you, Captain Blood."

Blood considered him with narrowing eyes. Was the man so utterly a fool, or was he merely dishonest?

"Oh, sharper than the serpent's tooth!" he laughed. "Sure now I must spend the remainder of my days in

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succouring British colonies in distress. Meanwhile, here I am and here I stay until I have my twenty thousand pieces." He flung his hat on the table, drew up a chair, sat down, and crossed his legs. "It's a warm day, Colonel, so it is."

The Colonel's eyes flashed. "Captain Macartney, the guard is waiting in the gallery. Be good enough to call it."

"Will ye be intending to arrest me?"

The Colonel's eyes gloomed at him. "Naturally, sir. It is my clear duty. It has been my duty from the moment that you landed here. You show me that I should have considered nothing else whatever my own needs." He waved a hand to the soldier who had paused by the door. "If you please, Captain Macartney."

"Oh, a moment yet, Captain Macartney. A moment yet, Colonel." Blood raised his hand. "This amounts to a declaration of war."

The Colonel shrugged contemptuously. "You may so regard it if you choose. It is not material."

Captain Blood's doubts about the man's honesty were completely dissipated. He was just a fool with a mental vision that could perceive one object only at a time.

"Indeed, and it's most material. Since you declare war on me, war you shall have; and I warn you that you'll find me as ruthless an opponent as the Spaniards found me yesterday when I was your ally."

"By God!" swore Macartney. "Here's fine talk from a man whose person we hold!"

"Others have held me before, Captain Macartney. Don't be attaching too much importance to that." He paused to smile, and then resumed. "It's fortunate now for Antigua that the war you have declared on me may be fought without bloodshed. Indeed, you may perceive at a glance that it has been fought already, that the strategic advantages lie with me, and, therefore, that nothing remains for you but capitulation."

"I perceive nothing of the kind, sir."

"That is because you are slow to perceive the obvious. I am coming to think that at home they regard this as a necessary qualification in a Colonial Governor. A moment's patience, Colonel, while I point out to you that my ship is off the harbour. She carries two hundred of the toughest fighting-men, who would devour your spineless militia at a gulp. She carries forty guns, the half of which could be landed on the bluff within an hour, and within another hour Saint John's would be a dust-heap. If you think they would hesitate because this colony is English, I'll remind you that a third of my following is French and the other two thirds are outlaws like myself. They would sack this town with pleasure, firstly because it is held in the name of King James, a name detestable to all of them, and secondly because the gold you have been finding in Antigua should make it well worth the sacking."

Macartney, purple in the face, was fingering his sword-hilt. But it was the Colonel, livid with passion, who answered, waving one of his bony, freckled hands.

"You infamous pirate scoundrel! You damned escaped convict! You've forgot one thing: that until you can get back to your pestilential buccaneers, none of this can happen."

"We have to thank him for the warning, sir," Captain Macartney jeered.

"Ah, bah! Ye've no imagination, as I suspected yesterday. Your muleteer gave me a glimpse of what to expect from you. I took my measures accordingly, so I did. I left orders with my lieutenant to assume at twelve o'clock that war had been declared, and to land the guns and haul them to the fort, whence they command the town. I left your mules with him for the purpose." He glanced at the timepiece on the overmantel. "It's nearly half-past twelve already. From your windows here you can see the fort." He stood up and proffered his telescope. "Assure yourself that what I have said is happening."

There was a pause in which the Captain-General considered him with eyes of hate. Then in silence he took the telescope and went to the window. When he turned from it again, he was fierce as a rattlesnake. "But you forget one thing still. That we hold you. I'll send word to your pirate scum that at the first shot from them I'll hang you. The guard, Macartney. There's been talk enough."

"Oh, a moment yet," Blood begged. "Ye're so plaguily hasty in your conclusions. Wolverstone has my orders, and no threat to my life will swerve him from them by a hair's breadth. Hang me if you will." He shrugged. "If I set great store by life, I should hardly follow the trade of a buccaneer. But when you've hanged me, be sure that not one stone of Saint John's will be left upon another, not man, woman, or child will my buccaneers spare in avenging me. Consider that, and consider at the same time your duty to this colony and to your king — this duty by which you rightly set such store."

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The Governor's pale eyes stabbed him as if they would reach his soul. Calm and intrepid he stood before them, so calm in all the circumstances as almost to intimidate.

The Colonel looked at Macartney, as if for help. He found none there. Irritably he broke out at last: "Oh, stab me! I am well served for dealing with a pirate! To be rid of you, I'll pay you your twenty thousand pieces, and so farewell and be damned to you."

"Twenty thousand pieces!" Blood raised his eyebrows in surprise. "But that was whilst I was your ally; that was before ye declared war upon me."

"What the devil do you mean now?"

"That since ye admit defeat, we will pass to the discussion of terms."

"Terms? What terms?" The Captain-General's exasperation was swiftly mounting him.

"You shall hear them. First, the twenty thousand pieces of eight that you owe my men for services rendered. Next, thirty thousand for the redemption of the town from the bombardment that is preparing."

"What? By God, sir . . ."

"Next," Captain Blood pursued relentlessly, "ten thousand pieces for your own ransom, ten thousand for the ransom of your own family, and five thousand for that of other persons of consequences in Saint John's, including Captain Macartney here. That makes seventy-five thousand pieces of eight, and they must be paid within the next hour, since later will be too late."

The Captain-General looked unutterable things. He tried to speak. But speech failed him. He sat down heavily. At last he found his voice. It came thick and quavering.

"You . . . you abuse my patience! You surely . . . You think me mad?"

"Best hang him, Colonel, and have done," Macartney exploded.

"And thereby destroy the colony it is your duty at all costs — at all costs, mark you — to preserve."

The Captain-General passed a hand across his wet, pallid brow, and groaned.

They talked, of course, for some time yet; but ever within the circle of what had been said already, until in the end Colonel Courtney broke into a laugh that was almost hysterical.

"Stab me, sir! It only remains to marvel at your moderation. You might have asked seven hundred thousand pieces, or seven millions . . ."

"True," Blood interrupted him. "But then I am by nature moderate, and also I have a notion of the resources of your treasury."

"But the time!" cried the Governor desperately, to show that he had yielded. "How can I collect the sum within an hour?"

"I'll be reasonable. Send me the money to the bluff by sunset, and I'll withdraw. And now I'll take my leave at once, so as to suspend the operations. It's a very good day I'll be wishing you."

They let him go, perforce. And at sunset Captain Macartney rode out to the gun emplacements of the buccaneers followed by a Negro leading a mule on which the gold was laden.

Captain Blood came forward alone to receive him.

"It isn't what you'd have got from me," said the choleric captain through his teeth.

"I'll remember that in case you should ever command a settlement. And now, sir, to business. What do these sacks hold?"

"You'll find five thousand pieces in each."

"Then set me down four of them: the twenty thousand pieces for which I agreed to serve Antigua. The rest you can take back to the Captain-General with my compliments. Let the experience teach him, and you, too, Captain, darling, that a man's first duty is less to his office than to his own honour, and that he cannot perform it unless he fulfils the engagements of his word."

Captain Macartney sucked in his breath. "Gads life!" he exclaimed huskily. "And you're a pirate!"

Sternly came the vibrant, metallic voice of the buccaneer. "I am Captain Blood."