

CHAPTER XII

FATHER HENRIQUES

The night came down swiftly, for a great stormcloud, in which jagged lightning played, blotted out the last rays of the sunk sun. Then, with rolling thunder and torrents of rain, the tempest burst over the sinking ship. The mariners could no longer see to steer, they knew not whither they were going, only the lessened seas told them that they had entered the harbour mouth. Presently the San Antonio struck upon a rock, and the shock of it threw Castell, who was bending over the senseless shape of Margaret, against the bulwarks and dazed him.

There arose a great cry of "The vessel founders!" and water seemed to be pouring on the deck, though whether this were from the sea or from the deluge of the falling rain he did not know. Then came another cry of "Get out the boat, or we perish!" and a sound of men working in the darkness. The ship swung round and round and settled down. There was a flash of lightning, and by it Castell saw Betty holding the unconscious Margaret in her strong arms. She saw him also, and screamed to him to come to the boat. He started to obey, then remembered Peter. Peter might not be dead; what should he say to Margaret if he left him there to drown? He crept to where he lay upon the deck, and called to a sailor who rushed by to help him. The man answered with a curse, and vanished into the deep gloom. So, unaided, Castell essayed the task of lifting this heavy body, but his right arm being almost useless, could do no

more than drag it into a sitting posture, and thus, by slow degrees, across the deck to where he imagined the boat to be.

But here there was no boat, and now the sound of voices came from the other side of the ship, so he must drag it back again. By the time he reached the starboard bulwarks all was silent, and another flash of lightning showed him the boat, crowded with people, upon the crest of a wave, fifty yards or more from him, whilst others, who had not been able to enter, clung to its stern and gunwale. He shouted aloud, but no answer came, either because none were left living on the ship, or because in all that turmoil they could not hear him.

Then Castell, knowing that he had done everything that he could, dragged Peter under the overhanging deck of the forward tower, which gave some little shelter from the rain, and, laying his bleeding head upon his knees so that it might be lifted above the wash of the waters, sat himself down and began to say prayers after the Jewish fashion whilst awaiting his end.

That he was about to die he had no doubt, for the waist of the ship, as he could perceive by the lightning, was almost level with the sea, which, however, here in the harbour was now much calmer than it had been. This he knew, for although the rain still fell steadily and the wind howled above, no spray broke over them. Deeper and deeper sank the caravel as she drifted onwards, till at length the water washed over her deck from side to side, so that Castell was obliged to seat himself on

the second step of the ladder down which Peter had charged up on the Spaniards. A while passed, and he became aware that the San Antonio had ceased to move, and wondered what this might mean. The storm had rolled away now, and he could see the stars; also with it went the wind. The night grew warmer, too, which was well for him, for otherwise, wet as he was, he must have perished. Still it was a long night, the longest that ever he had spent, nor did any sleep come to relieve his misery or make his end easier, for the pain from the arrow wound in his arm kept him awake.

So there he sat, wondering if Margaret was dead, as Peter seemed to be dead, and if so, whether their spirits were watching him now, watching and waiting till he joined them. He thought, too, of the days of his prosperity until he had seen the accursed face of d'Aguilar, and of all the worthless wealth that was his, and what would become of it. He hoped even that Margaret was gone; better that she should be dead than live on in shame and misery. If there were a God, how came it that He could allow such things to happen in the world? Then he remembered how, when Job sat in just such an evil case, his wife had invited him to curse God and die, and how the patriarch had answered to her, "What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Remembered, too, after all his troubles, what had been the end of that just man, and therefrom took some little comfort. After this a stupor crept over him, and his last thought was that the vessel had sunk and he was departing into the deeps of death.

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Listen! A voice called, and Castell awoke to see that it was growing light, and that before him supporting himself on the rail of the ladder, stood the tall form of Peter--Peter with a ghastly, blood-stained countenance, chattering teeth, and glazed, unnatural eyes.

"Do you live, John Castell?" said that hollow voice, "or are we both dead and in hell?"

"Nay," he answered, "I live yet; we are still this side of doom."

"What has chanced?" asked Peter. "I have been lost in a great blackness."

Castell told him briefly.

Peter listened till he had done, then staggered to the bulwark rail and looked about him, making no comment.

"I can see nothing," he said presently--"the mist is too deep; but I think we must lie near the shore. Come, help me. Let us try to find victuals; I am faint."

Castell rose, stretched his cramped limbs, and going to him, placed his uninjured arm round Peter's middle, and thus supported him towards the

stern of the ship, where he guessed that the main cabin would be. They found and entered it, a small place, but richly furnished, with a carved crucifix screwed to its sternmost wall. A piece of pickled meat and some of the hard wheaten cakes such as sailors use, lay upon the floor where they had been cast from the table, while in a swinging rack above stood flagons of wine and of water. Castell found a horn mug, and filling it with wine gave it to Peter, who drank greedily, then handed it back to him, who also drank. Afterwards they cut off portions of the meat with their knives, and swallowed them, though Peter did this with great difficulty because of the hurt to his head and neck. Then they drank more wine, and, somewhat refreshed, left the place.

The mist was still so thick that they could see nothing, and therefore they went into the wreck of that cabin which had been occupied by Margaret and Betty, sat themselves down upon the bed wherein they had slept, and waited. Resting thus, Peter noted that this cabin had been fitted sumptuously as though for the occupation of a great lady, for even the vessels were of silver, and in a wardrobe, whereof the doors were open, hung beautiful gowns. Also, there were a few written books, on the outer leaves of one of which Margaret had set down some notes and a prayer of her own making, petitioning that Heaven would protect her; that Peter and her father might be living and learn the truth of what had befallen, and that it would please the saints to deliver her, and to bring them together again. This book Peter thrust away within his jerkin to study at his leisure.

Now the sun rose suddenly above the eastern range of the mountains wherewith they were surrounded. Leaving the cabin, they climbed to the forecastle tower and gazed about them, to find that they were in a land-locked harbour, and stranded not more than a hundred yards from the shore. By tying a piece of iron to a rope and letting it down into the sea, they discovered that they lay upon a ridge, and that there were but four feet of water beneath their bow, and, having learned this, determined to wade to the beach. First, however, they went back to the cabin and filled a leather bag they found with food and wine. Then, by an afterthought, they searched for the place where d'Aguilar slept, and discovered it between decks; also a strong-box which they made shift to break open with an iron bar.

In it was a great store of gold, placed there, no doubt, for the payment of the crew, and with it some jewels. The jewels they left, but the money they divided and stowed it about them to serve their needs should they come safe ashore. Then they washed each other's wounds and bound them up, and descending the ladder which had been thrown over the ship's side when the Spaniards escaped in the boat, let themselves down into the sea and bade farewell to the San Antonio.

By now the wind had fallen and the sun shone brightly, warming their chilled blood; also the water, which was quite calm, did not rise much above their middles, so that they were able--the bottom being smooth and sandy--to wade without trouble to the shore. As they drew near to it

they saw people gathering there, and guessed that they came from the little town of Motril, which lay up the river that here ran into the bay. Also they saw other things--namely, the boat of the San Antonio upon the shore, and rejoiced to know that it had come safe to land, for it rested upon its keel with but little water in its bottom. Lying here and there also were the corpses of drowned men, five or six of them: no doubt those sailors who had swum after the boat or clung to its gunwale, but among these bodies none were those of women.

When at length they reached the shore, very few people were left there, for of the rest some had begun to wade out towards the ship to plunder her, whilst others had gone to fetch boats for the same purpose. Therefore, the company who awaited them consisted only of women, children, three old men, and a priest. The last, a hungry-eyed, smooth-faced, sly-looking man, advanced to greet them courteously, bidding them thank God for their escape.

"That we do indeed," said Castell; "but tell us, Father, where are our companions?"

"There are some of them," answered the priest, pointing to the dead bodies; "the rest, with the two señoras, started two hours ago for Granada. The Marquis of Morella, from whom I hold this cure, told us that his ship had sunk, and that no one else was left alive, and, as the mist hid everything, we believed him. That is why we were not here before, for," he added significantly, "we are poor folk, to whom the

saints send few wrecks."

"How did they go to Granada, Father?" asked Castell. "On foot?"

"Nay, Señor, they took all the horses and mules in the village by force, though the marquis promised that he would return them and pay for their hire later, and we trusted him because we must. The ladies wept much, and prayed us to take them in and keep them; but this the marquis would not allow, although they seemed so sad and weary. God send that we see our good beasts back again," he added piously.

"Have you any left for us? We have a little money, and can pay for them if they be not too dear."

"Not one, Señor--not one; the place has been cleared even down to the mares in foal. But, indeed you seem scarcely fit to ride at present, who have undergone so much," and he pointed to Peter's wounded head and Castell's bandaged arm. "Why do you not stay and rest awhile?"

"Because I am the father of one of the señoras, and doubtless she thinks me drowned, and this señor is her affianced husband," answered Castell briefly.

"Ah!" said the priest, looking at them with interest, "then what relation to her is the marquis? Well, perhaps I had better not ask, for this is no confessional, is it? I understand that you are anxious, for

that great grandee has the reputation of being gay--an excellent son of the Church, but without doubt very gay," and he shook his shaven head and smiled. "But come up to the village, Señors, where you can rest and have your hurts attended to; afterwards we will talk."

"We had best go," said Castell in English to Peter. "There are no horses on this beach, and we cannot walk to Granada in our state."

Peter nodded, and, led by the priest, whose name they discovered to be Henriques, they started.

On the crest of the hill a few hundred paces away they turned and looked back, to see that every able-bodied inhabitant of the village seemed by now to be engaged in plundering the stranded vessel.

"They are paying themselves for the mules and horses," said Fray Henriques with a shrug. "So I see," answered Castell, "but you----" and he stopped.

"Oh, do not be afraid for me," replied the priest with a cunning little smile. "The Church does not loot; but in the end the Church gets her share. These are a pious folk. Only when he learns that the caravel did not sink after all, I fear the marquis will demand an account of us."

Then they limped on over the hill, and presently saw the white-walled and red-roofed village beneath them on the banks of the river.

Five minutes later their guide stopped at a door in a roughly paved street, which he opened with a key.

"My humble dwelling, when I am in residence here, and not at Granada," he said, "in which I shall be honoured to receive you. Look, near by is the church."

Then they entered a patio, or courtyard, where some orange-trees grew round a fountain of water, and a life-sized crucifix stood against the wall. As he passed this sacred emblem Peter bowed and crossed himself, an example that Castell did not follow. The priest looked at him sharply.

"Surely, Señor," he said, "you should do reverence to the symbol of our Saviour, who, by His mercy, have just been saved from the death which the marquis told me had overtaken both of you."

"My right arm is hurt," answered Castell readily, "so I must do that reverence in my heart."

"I understand, Señor; but if you are a stranger to this country, which you do not seem to be, who speak its tongue so well, with your permission I will warn you that here it is wise not to confine your reverences to the heart. Of late the directors of the Inquisition have become somewhat strict, and expect that the outward forms should be

observed as well. Indeed, when I was a familiar of the Holy Office at Seville, I have seen men burned for the neglect of them. You have two arms and a head, Señor, also a knee that can be bent."

"Pardon me," answered Castell to this lecture. "I was thinking of other matters. The carrying off of my daughter at the hands of your patron, the Marquis of Morella, for instance."

Then, making no reply, the priest led them through his sitting-room to a bed-chamber with high barred windows, that, although it was large and lofty, reminded them somehow of a prison cell. Here he left them, saying that he would go to find the local surgeon, who, it seemed, was a barber also, if, indeed, he were not engaged in "lightening the ship," recommending them meanwhile to take off their wet clothes and lie down to rest.

A woman having brought hot water and some loose garments in which to wrap themselves while their own were drying, they undressed and washed and afterwards, utterly worn out, threw themselves down and fell asleep upon the beds, having first hidden away their gold in the food bag, which Peter placed beneath his pillow. Two hours later or more they were awakened by the arrival of Father Henriques and the barber-surgeon, accompanied by the woman-servant, and who brought them back their clothes cleaned and dried.

When the surgeon saw Peter's hurt to the left side of his neck and

shoulder, which now were black, swollen, and very stiff, he shook his head, and said that time and rest alone could cure it, and that he must have been born under a fortunate star to have escaped with his life, which, save for his steel cap and leather jerkin, he would never have done. As no bones were broken, however, all that he could do was to dress the parts with some soothing ointment and cover them with clean cloths. This finished, he turned to Castell's wound, that was through the fleshy part of the right forearm, and, having syringed it out with warm water and oil, bound it up, saying that he would be well in a week. He added drily that the gale must have been fiercer even than he thought, since it could blow an arrow through a man's arm--a saying at which the priest pricked up his ears.

To this Castell made no answer, but producing a piece of Morella's gold, offered it to him for his services, asking him at the same time to procure them mules or horses, if he could. The barber promised to try to do so, and being well pleased with his fee, which was a great one for Motril, said that he would see them again in the evening, and if he could hear of any beasts would tell them of it then. Also he promised to bring them some clothes and cloaks of Spanish make, since those they had were not fit to travel in through that country, being soiled and blood-stained.

After he had gone, and the priest with him, who was busy seeing to the division of the spoils from the ship and making sure of his own share, the servant, a good soul, brought them soup, which they drank. Then they

lay down again upon the beds and talked together as to what they should do.

Castell was downhearted, pointing out that they were still as far from Margaret as ever, who was now once more lost to them, and in the hand of Morella, whence they could scarcely hope to snatch her. It would seem also that she was being taken to the Moorish city of Granada, if she were not already there, where Christian law and justice had no power.

When he had heard him out, Peter, whose heart was always stout, answered:

"God has as much power in Granada as in London, or on the seas whence He has saved us. I think, Sir, that we have great reason to be thankful to God, seeing that we are both alive to-day, who might so well have been dead, and that Margaret is alive also, and, as we believe, unharmed. Further, this Spanish thief of women is, it would seem, a strange man, that is, if there be any truth in his words, for although he could steal her, it appears that he cannot find it in his heart to do her violence, but is determined to win her only with her own consent, which I think will not be had readily. Also, he shrinks from murder, who, when he could have butchered us, did not do so."

"I have known such men before," said Castell, "who hold some sins venial, but others deadly to their souls. It is a fruit of superstition."

"Then, Sir, let us pray that Morella's superstitions may remain strong, and get us to Granada as quickly as we can, for there, remember, you have friends, both among the Jews and Moors, who have traded with the place for many years, and these may give us shelter. Therefore, though things are bad, still they might be worse."

"That is so," answered Castell more cheerfully, "if, indeed, she has been taken to Granada; and as to this, we will try to learn something from the barber or the Father Henriques."

"I put no faith in that priest, a sly fellow who is in the pay of Morella," answered Peter.

Then they were silent, being still very weary, and having nothing more to say, but much to think about.

About sundown the doctor came back and dressed their wounds. He brought with him a stock of clothes of Spanish make, hats and two heavy cloaks fit to travel in, which they bought from him at a good price. Also, he said that he had two fine mules in the courtyard, and Castell went out to look at them. They were sorry beasts enough, being poor and wayworn, but as no others were to be had they returned to the room to talk as to the price of them and their saddles. The chaffering was long, for he asked twice their value, which Castell said poor shipwrecked men could not pay; but in the end they struck a bargain, under which the barber

was to keep and feed the mules for the night, and bring them round next morning with a guide who would show them the road to Granada. Meanwhile, they paid him for the clothes, but not for the beasts.

Also they tried to learn something from him about the Marquis of Morella, but, like the Fray Henriques, the man was cunning, and kept his mouth shut, saying that it was ill for poor men like himself to chatter of the great, and that at Granada they could hear everything. So he went away, leaving some medicine for them to drink, and shortly afterwards the priest appeared.

He was in high good-humour, having secured those jewels which they had left behind in the iron coffer as his share of the spoil of the ship.

Taking note of him as he showed and fondled them, Castell added up the man, and concluded that he was very avaricious; one who hated the poverty in which he had been reared, and would do much for money.

Indeed, when he spoke bitterly of the thieves who had been at the ship's strong-box and taken nearly all the gold, Castell determined that he must never know who those thieves were, lest they should meet with some accident on their journey.

At length the trinkets were put away, and the priest said that they must sup with him, but lamented that he had no wine to give them, who was forced to drink water; whereon Castell prayed him to procure a few flasks of the best at their charges, which, nothing loth, he sent his servant out to do.

So, dressed in their new Spanish clothes, and having all the gold hidden about them in two money-belts that they had bought from the barber at the same time, they went in to supper, which consisted of a Spanish dish called olla podrida--a kind of rich stew--bread, cheese, and fruit.

Also the wine that they had bought was there, very good and strong, and, whilst taking but little of it themselves for fear they should fever their wounds, they persuaded Father Henriques to drink heartily, so that in the end he forgot his cunning, and spoke with freedom. Then, seeing that he was in a ripe humour, Castell asked him about the Marquis of Morella, and how it happened that he had a house in the Moorish capital of Granada.

"Because he is half a Moor," answered the priest. "His father, it is said, was the Prince of Viana, and his mother a lady of royal Moorish blood, from whom he inherited great wealth, and his lands and palace in Granada. There, too, he loves to dwell, who, although he is so good a Christian by faith, has many heathen tastes, and, like the Moors, surrounds himself with a seraglio of beautiful women, as I know, for often I act as his chaplain, as in Granada there are no priests. Moreover, there is a purpose in all this, for, being partly of their blood, he is accredited to the court of their sultan, Boabdil, by Ferdinand and Isabella in whose interests he works in secret. For, strangers, you should know, if you do not know it already, that their Majesties have for long been at war against the Moor, and purpose to take what remains of his kingdom from him, and make it Christian, as

they have already taken Malaga, and purified it by blood and fire from the accursed stain of infidelity."

"Yes," said Castell, "we heard that in England, for I am a merchant who have dealings with Granada, whither I am going on my affairs."

"On what affairs then goes the señora, who you say is your daughter, and what is that story that the sailors told of, about a fight between the San Antonio and an English ship, which indeed we saw in the offing yesterday? And why did the wind blow an arrow through your arm, friend Merchant? And how came it that you two were left aboard the caravel when the marquis and his people escaped?"

"You ask many questions, holy Father. Peter, fill the glass of his reverence; he drinks nothing who thinks that it is always Lent. Your health, Father. Ah! well emptied. Fill it again, Peter, and pass me the flask. Now I will begin to answer you with the story of the shipwreck." And he commenced an endless tale of the winds and sails and rocks and masts carried away, and of the English ship that tried to help the Spanish ship, and so forth, till at length the priest, whose glass Peter filled whenever his head was turned, fell back in his chair asleep.

"Now," whispered Peter in English across the table to Castell--"now I think that we had best go to bed, for we have learned much from this holy spy--as I take him to be--and told little."

So they crept away quietly to their chamber, and, having swallowed the draught that the doctor had given them, said their prayers each in his own fashion, locked the door, and lay down to rest as well as their wounds and sore anxieties would allow them.