

# *The Surgeon's Apprentice*

JOHN BIGGINS



*A tale of medicine, war, seafaring and stargazing  
from the very beginnings of the modern world*

[johnbigginsfiction.com](http://johnbigginsfiction.com)

The Surgeon's Apprentice  
A novel by  
John Biggins

Copyright © John Biggins 2010

All rights reserved

Published by John Biggins, 2010

This is a limited extract from  
The Surgeon's Apprentice

[johnbigginsfiction.com](http://johnbigginsfiction.com)

## *The story so far*

*Forced to flee from Colchester to the Netherlands in the spring of 1625 following a failed operation for bladder stone on a local magnate, 14-year old Frans van Raveyck and his surgeon stepfather have been obliged to take service aboard a small Dutch warship, the pinnace Eenhoorn, until such time as they can safely return to England. But in September their ship is ordered to Plymouth to form part of the Dutch squadron in a mighty Anglo-Dutch fleet which will put an army ashore somewhere on the coast of Spain.*

*The only trouble is that when the fleet finally sets sail in the middle of October its leader Sir Edward Cecil, Viscount Wimbledon, has still not decided on its destination. At last in the final days of October, with the fleet now off the coast of southern Spain, a great council is held aboard Sir Edward's flagship to decide this small matter. And the Dutch admirals not having been formally invited, young Frans (who happens to know both English and shorthand) is sent along instead to observe the proceedings under the pretence of taking a note.*

## Chapter Eleven

The next day, which was the 30th of October, just after midday and at thirty-six degrees of latitude, we sighted a great many sails over the horizon to westward. We thought at first that we must have stumbled unwitting upon the Spanish plate fleet – and wondered in that case how we might take it, given that we had but thirty-four vessels, whilst the Spaniards would certainly be twice or three times as many. But two of our ketches having been sent to reconnoitre, we soon learned that they were the Earl of Essex's ships together with those of the Earl of Denbigh, fifty-one vessels in all, which had been scattered by the storm but had reassembled some fifty leagues to the west of Cape Saint Vincent. With them were four small fishing carracks out of Lisbon which they had taken the day before, one of which had been blown out to sea the previous week and was in such desperate necessity when they came upon her that her crew were drinking their own urine for lack of water. The Portugalers told us that the silver fleet was indeed on its way, and that four of its galleons had already arrived at Lisbon ahead of the rest. Sir Edward (we heard) was mighty suspicious of this intelligence, and thought the carracks might have been sent out on purpose to beguile us. But at least our armada was together once more, so it might now proceed to business.

And what that business was to be, might at last be

decided upon since we were in Spanish waters and the weather likewise calm enough to summon a council. So at four bells of the forenoon watch an order came from the *Geluckige Leeuw* that I was to change into my best clothes and betake myself aboard the *Ann Royal* where a council of war was convened, and there make a note of the proceedings so that the Jonker Willem and Doctor Reael might peruse it afterwards to see what it was that our allies purposed, they themselves not being privy to their plans in the event that they had any. I duly clambered down into the *Leeuw's* longboat with my notebook under my arm and my pen-case and inkhorn in my pocket, and was saluted by the boat's coxswain like a person of consideration (which I will confess was not a little gratifying to me) and then rowed across to the flagship where I was most cordially received by Lord Wimbledon's secretary Mister Glanville and allocated a place at a table in the great cabin alongside one of his own clerks. "And if you need to know who any of the speakers is, or have any other such question," he said, "you need only to ask Mister Hopkins here, who will gladly assist you."

The council this time was not a war council, consisting only of Sir Edward and his principal captains, but a *magnum concilium* of the entire English fleet comprising not only the admiral, the vice- and rear-admirals and the colonels of the army regiments, but also the captains of the collier ships; which made altogether about a hundred persons crowded into that room. We all stood up and removed our hats as Sir Edward entered with his principal

officers following him, Mister Hopkins kindly whispering to me who each of them was, such as “The podgy-faced fool is My Lord Essex”. Sir Edward sat at the head of the table with Essex and Denbigh beside him, then the others were seated around it according to their degree and precedence, with the rest on benches behind them or standing up against the walls. So before long it was mighty close in the cabin, the stern windows having mostly been boarded up; the atmosphere thick with the smell of unwashed bodies and with tobacco smoke since many of the collier captains persisted in puffing at their clay pipes, until from foulness of the air the rest prevailed upon them to put them out. Then we proceeded to business.

And such a council it was too, as I have never seen the like of before or since: more like a hospital ward for the feeble-witted in plenary session than a grave discussion among statesmen and captains such as I had read of in the antique authors; where Pompey and then Crassus each address the Roman Senate in measured cadences of faultless Latin prose and are listened to by the assembled *patres* in their togas with grave attention, then another stands up and agrees with them or gives rebuttal, and all as orderly and calm as you please until the venerable senators, having heard and weighed the arguments for and against, come after due deliberation to a motion which is then put to the vote. Or perhaps the antique historians put a fair face on it all, and the proceedings of the old Romans were in fact as muddled and inconsequential as our own; I cannot tell. I know only that it was mighty hard work for me to keep up

with it all and produce a fair shorthand record to write my report from, and I often had to turn to Mister Hopkins and enquire in a whisper who such-and-such a speaker was and what exactly had he just said? And was told by him as often as not that he could make no sense of it either.

Though no agenda had been drawn up for the meeting (which Sir Edward owned was a grave defect and occasioned by the pressure of business upon his clerks) we divined in the end that its purpose was to decide what we should do next, we having come all this way and no particular enterprise being yet in prospect. He revealed that His Majesty's secret commission to him at Plymouth, besides taking the Mexico fleet, was to capture and hold some convenient port on the coasts of Spain where our vessels might pass the winter and come out again in the spring to harry the enemy's shipping. And though His Majesty had not been over-precise in the matter (geography and pilotage not being the principal business of monarchs) he himself considered, having taken the advice of his most senior sea-captains, that we should head for San Lucar, which was at the mouth of the Guadalquivir River, and capture that town, which would give us alike a safe haven for the winter and a base whence our soldiers might advance inland to take Jerez and Seville, which were not far away and would give them good opportunity for plunder since not a man among them had yet received a single farthing of his wages.

At these words of his you would have thought a fox had got into a hen-house, to see the commotion and

dismay among the assembled collier captains who all fell to wailing and lamenting in a manner most pitiable to behold, fairly rending their garments and pouring dust on their heads after the manner of the ancient Jews. They all swore most vehemently and as one man that if San Lucar were to be our aim, why then surely we were all undone, because it was a most villainous haven and in no way convenient as an anchorage for so great a fleet; that it was shallow, and the river mouth full of treacherous sand-bars which shifted from day to day; and was likewise exposed to any gale of wind from the south-west so that ships lying there would have no shelter from the seas and with their anchors dragging in the sandy bottom, would infallibly be cast ashore and lost: that in short, if Viscount Wimbleton had asked them to nominate the very worst haven that might be found upon all the coasts of Europe, then they would have been unanimous in choosing San Lucar; and if he commanded them to anchor therein then he was no better than a heathen Tartar and they would all surely be drowned and their wives left widows and their children orphans. And so on and so forth, so that you would have thought from their wailing that San Lucar was the very mouth of hell or that Sir Edward was commanding them to stick their heads into a lion's jaws.

When they had quietened somewhat Sir Edward enquired how it was that they knew all this? And they told him that they were well acquainted with that port because the London sea-coal trade being slack in the summer months, they had been accustomed each year between May

and September to employ their vessels carrying from San Lucar a sweet wine called “sack” which is produced in that region, and which the English are inordinately fond of though it conduces greatly to bladder stone and the gout. So they knew the place pretty well (they said). And esteemed it a most detestable hole.

“So then, sirs,” said Sir Edward at last, who I could see was struggling to contain his annoyance, “Why did you not inform us of this when we were with His Majesty at Plymouth? We spoke of San Lucar then, and you had naught to say against it. So why do you now tell me that the place is so villainous a haven? Either you were wrong then, or you are wrong now.”

And at this the captains fell once more to wailing and bemoaning; until one of them, Captain Brigstocke of Hartlepool, a great pocky-faced fellow, spoke for the rest.

“My Lord, when we were with His Majesty and My Lord Buckingham at Plymouth we indeed told them how ill a harbour San Lucar is for great ships to lie in; but they paid no heed to us, we being but persons of lowly degree. But now we are here, and winter already close with all its storms and hazards, we are put in greater and more vivid a mind of how evil a haven that place is than when we were so far distant from it in England. We crave only Your Lordship’s pardon that we did not make this plainer at the time.”

Sir Edward harrumphed, and gave Master Brigstocke a look as though he did not believe him but was too much a gentleman to say so. Then he sighed and returned wearily

to shuffling his papers.

“Well then, my good sirs.” he said at last, “Where else might we land upon these coasts, if geography denies San Lucar to us? In this I depend entirely upon your advice, for I freely admit that I am a land soldier and know nothing at all of the sea, so that if you assured me our ships could come out of the water and advance to Seville on wheels I would be compelled by my own ignorance to believe you.” There was silence at this. “Come, sirs, what do you advise?” he asked, looking about the table.

There was murmuring and whispering for some time, and nothing could be made of it by me. So I turned to Mister Hopkins to seek his opinion. “Do all Sir Edward’s councils proceed thus?” I whispered.

He laughed. “Pretty well all. Though a just and honest master, he lacks force and therefore allows matters to drift along willy-nilly for want of a firm hand and prior preparation. I have sat to take the minutes at five of his councils now, at Plymouth and on the way here, and at each of them Mister Glanville and I were in the greatest perplexity afterwards to discover what had been decided upon – or, indeed, what had been debated.”

“Why then are the collier captains so fearful?” I said. “They scarcely strike me as timorous men by nature, yet now they sound like so many old maids in breeches.”

“Indeed they do.” he replied, “And the reason for that is that their vessels are on charter to King Charles, and they rightly fear that if they are lost or damaged and themselves killed or wounded, then they will have to whistle for their

compensation, it being notorious that England's treasury is empty. The lords and gentlemen desire a fight, because war is their trade and their dignity and port depends upon it, and they have fortunes and lands to support their families if they are slain or maimed. These poor mariners, though, have nothing but their lives to hazard, and the ships which are their livelihoods, and so will be utterly undone if either suffer hurt. But hark, the meeting resumes..."

While we conferred Captain Argall (who commanded Essex's ship *Swiftsure*) had been consulting among the sailors and had made himself their spokesman.

"My Lord," he said, "after considering the matter somewhat we have concluded that the only ports accessible to us on this coast are Cadiz on the ocean side, or Málaga in the Mediterranean Sea, or Gibraltar which lies in the straits that separate the two. So we would respectfully suggest that Your Lordship considers each of these three with a view to selecting the most suitable." At this Captain Love of the *Ann Royal* interrupted him.

"Sir Samuel," he said, "while I hesitate to correct a fellow mariner, I would add that should Cadiz town prove too strong for us, I am informed that the bay behind it still contains a tolerable harbour on its north side called Puerto Santa María which might serve our purpose equally well." At this he stood up and looked round the great cabin. "Does anyone here present know anything of this place, for I confess I have never visited it." There was silence at this: it appeared that no one knew anything of Puerto Santa María (though when I related this later to our mate Ellert

Hendrickssen he was incredulous and said that the English collier captains were plainly mendacious rascals or very forgetful, because their ships plied from there quite as much as from San Lucar, and their seafarers commonly called the place Saint Mary Port as though it was one of their own harbours). Sir Edward spoke at last:

“Very well then.” he said, “It seems to me that from ignorance of this Puerto whatever-it-is place we must debate the choice of Cadiz, Gibraltar and...what was the third place, Mister Glanville?...Ah yes, Málaga. So what can you tell me of them?”

Concerning Gibraltar, the opinion among all the army commanders was that though it was a fair haven and commodiously placed for harrying the enemy’s shipping, it was likewise too strong a fortress for us to attempt with the weak means at our disposal, having no horses now to drag our siege guns. Málaga was then considered, but dismissed in the end as being too far into the Mediterranean, so that our armada might be bottled up there next spring by contrary winds and unable to get home again if King Philip dispatched his fleet against England. So in the end Cadiz was chosen, not as being the most suitable goal, but rather the least unsuitable. Or of course Puerto Santa María across the bay if Cadiz proved too strong; so that in the end no one seemed any the wiser as to which of these two we would attempt first. In the end, after about two hours, the meeting ended – or rather expired – and all those present returned to their ships amid a great deal of snorting and God-damn-me-sir-ing that so little should have been

decided for so great an expenditure of time and breath.

\* \* \* \* \*

Next morning, the last day of October, the coast of Spain near Cape Granado came in sight: a low, sandy shore of dunes and scrub where the great Atlantic rollers broke on lonely beaches, with none to hear their incessant roaring since there was hardly a fisherman's hut between the Guadalquivir mouth and Cadiz Bay. But at least this time no plumes of smoke announced the great fleet's arrival, so there was still some small hope that Cadiz might be taken by surprise before messengers arrived to warn the town of its peril. This was indeed a reasonable enough surmise, because as the great concourse of topsails appeared over the horizon, gleaming white in the afternoon sunshine, and it became clear that this was not the Mexico fleet which would surely have sent messengers ahead of it, panic broke out among the folk of Cadiz, who remembered only too well how the English had sacked and burned the town during their last visit thirty years before. Gathering together such belongings as they could carry, people began to flee down the road that runs along the sandy isthmus that connects Cadiz to the mainland. The town had in it a mere four hundred soldiers, mostly elderly militiamen who would be of little use against regular troops, and no more than five barrels of powder. But Cadiz possessed a resource

greater than either men or munitions in the person of its governor Don Fernando Girón de Salcedo y Brivesca. Though above sixty years of age and half crippled by gout, he was carried out of his palace in a chair borne on two poles and taken to the main gate where he stemmed the rush out of the town, allowing the women and children to depart so as to reduce the number of mouths to feed but detaining all men of fighting age. He dispatched a messenger on horseback to warn the Corregidor of Jerez that the English were approaching, then sent the five rowing galleys at his disposal across the bay to Puerto Santa María to bring over soldiers and supplies as these arrived from the country round about. As the autumn dusk fell he was still being carried about the town by torchlight to instruct his captains, and was up again before dawn next morning as the first troops came ashore from the galleys.

By midday of the 1st of November, All Saints' Day, the garrison had doubled in size. The town's white Moorish walls and crenellated towers bristled with cannon and musket barrels, and a thousand pairs of eyes peered seaward to make out what it was the English intended doing, ominously massed in the bay to the north of the harbour entrance about a mile distant. The sight of so great a fleet would surely daunt the stoutest of hearts. But the day wore on, and the English quite inexplicably did nothing; only sat there and missed two successive tides which would have taken them into Cadiz Bay. Around forty sailing ships and galleys had been trapped in the bay by their arrival; but these now profited from their foe's hesitation by weighing

anchor and moving up on the flood tide into the innermost recesses of the bay, sinking blockships full of stones to close the channels behind them.

Meanwhile, aboard the *Ann Royal*, Sir Edward Cecil was deliberating with his secretary upon weighty matters. For it was plain that the long-smouldering enmity between the Earl of Denbigh and Baron Cromwell on one side and the Lords Delaware and Valentia on the other had at last broken out into flame.

“Mister Glanville,” he said wearily, “Please refresh my memory, if you will, concerning this matter.” Sir Edward was wan and bleary-eyed from having sat up all the previous night dictating orders to his secretaries and consulting with the regimental colonels and ordnance masters.

“It concerns Your Lordship’s decision to replace Sir Francis Stewart as your rear-admiral of the fleet – and therefore admiral of the fleet’s white squadron – after his ship was found unserviceable when we departed from Plymouth.”

“Yes? And what of it? I replaced him with the Earl of Denbigh as the rear-admiral of the fleet. And if that also makes him admiral of the white squadron as well then I can only say, so be it if the sailors would have it that way. For myself, I would never have thought to command a regiment of horse in such a convoluted manner, where the cornet who leads my right-flank squadron also becomes in some mysterious fashion a captain so far as that squadron is concerned, and likewise all his corporals sergeants by virtue

of the fact.”

“Quite so, my lord: the mariners have their own way of ordering their affairs and we landsmen must accommodate ourselves to them as best we can. But the rub in this particular case is, that when My Lord Denbigh became your rear-admiral he hoisted a white flag with a Saint George’s cross at his maintop to signify the fact.”

“Yes, I understand that: Captain Love was kind enough to explain to me this business of squadrons and colours while we still lay at Plymouth.”

“Excellent. So Your Lordship will therefore understand that as a consequence of My Lord Denbigh’s promotion, My Lord Delaware became vice-admiral of your own squadron – that is to say, the red one – to take his place, and now flies at his foretop a red flag with the Saint George’s cross on a square of white.”

“By foretop, do you mean the summit of the pole-thing at the front end of the ship? I confess myself little versed in such matters.”

“I do, my lord.”

“Good. So what grieves him in that?”

“It grieves My Lords Valentia and Cromwell that My Lord Delaware, who is but an English baron and therefore of lower precedence than themselves, they both being Irish viscounts, should have been promoted out of turn by yourself to take the place of an earl as vice-admiral of the red, when by right of precedence My Lord Valentia should have filled that charge, and My Lord Cromwell have been moved to replace him as vice-admiral of the blue

squadron.”

Cecil sighed, and tried his best to remain patient and collected amid this bewildering whirl of flags, mastheads and noble ranks. He spoke at last with the strained air of a man trying to control himself.

“Mister Glanville, I would remind My Lords Valentia and Cromwell that having been entrusted by His Majesty with the charge of lieutenant-general for this expedition, I have perfect and sufficient authority vested in me to make whomsoever I please the vice-admiral of my squadron, and might perfectly well appoint my cook or my barber to that office if I were so minded; or indeed create green, yellow, pink and purple squadrons if it pleased me to do so. In any case, regarding his degree Sir Francis Stewart was but a knight, and I still had him as my vice-admiral without any objection from the noble lords. So what troubles them about this promotion?”

“For the sake of harmony and the success of our expedition, my lord, the two noble lords were prepared to overlook the offence against precedence. And Your Lordship will recall that he himself consented, when the matter was discussed with them after the council of war held off the Scillies on the thirteenth of this month, that to satisfy their honour My Lord Valentia might also fly a plain red flag, My Lord Cromwell a plain blue one and My Lord Delaware a plain white one from whichever of their mast-tops was not already occupied by an admiral’s flag. But they complain now that My Lord Delaware flies not only the red flag with the Saint George cross at his foretop, which

signifies the substantive charge that he now occupies, but also the plain white flag at his maintop whereupon he has without authority placed a red cross to distinguish it, saying that a plain white flag is the mark of one seeking to surrender, or of a French royal ship, and he will not be thought either a coward or a Frenchman. So in consequence, they say, it might appear to an uninformed observer that we have two admirals and not one to the white squadron. And this, they say, is not only contrary to all discipline, but My Lord Delaware not presently being on English soil, he cannot even claim precedence over My Lord Cromwell by virtue of the former noble lord being an Irish viscount and the latter one an English baron, which he might be minded to do were we still lying at Plymouth.”

Sir Edward fought back an urge to go into his closet and hang himself.

“What then would the noble lords have me do about this, with us now at Cadiz – which I believe is a port in Spain, or we have all been mightily deceived – and the enemy barely a mile distant from us? Even if I were minded to do so I could scarcely demote My Lord Delaware from his present charge without causing the very gravest confusion in the fleet; and likewise I can hardly clamber up the mast of his ship and rip off the offending cross with my own hands. What do you advise, Mister Glanville? Can we resolve this dispute by the exercise of common sense, or must it come to Their Lordships fighting a three-cornered duel on my quarterdeck while the Spaniards look on?”

“I have taken the trouble, my lord, to consult the late

King James's instructions concerning precedence, a copy of which was brought aboard when we were at Plymouth. And I see therein that when Parliament's late subsidy in aid was voted, the name of Lord Carew, who is an English baron, appeared in the list above that of Lord Grandison, who is an Irish viscount. So that at least may settle the question of degree for the moment."

Sir Edward sat for some time slumped at the table with his face in his hands, shaking his head in disbelief. He spoke at last.

"Dear God, how extraordinary! What foresight is revealed here, Mister Glanville: what perfection. We have rotten beef and sour beer and spoiled biscuit and wet powder, and the ordnance master informs me that many of the cannon shot are too large to fit the cannon, and likewise some of the muskets lately supplied to us by the contractors are without touch-holes so that they cannot be fired but only swung like a club. And to complete our misfortunes, two hundred men aboard this vessel now lie sick with the spotted fever and I know not how many aboard the other ships. Yet we must be of good heart and not despair, because we have aboard a copy of His Late Majesty's instructions concerning precedence among peers of the realm. But what of this wretched flag? For myself, so long as the noble lords obey my orders then I care not a fig whether they fly a hundred flags of every colour of the rainbow, or no flags at all."

"Quite so, my lord: my own sentiments precisely. But the noble lords are none the less much exercised on the

matter: and say likewise – though I hesitate to mention this – that though Your Lordship is His Majesty’s lieutenant-general as regards his military office, he is otherwise but a viscount of very recent creation, his elevation to that rank not yet confirmed by Parliament, and he is therefore unqualified to resolve questions of honour by virtue of his own superior precedence, so that the Garter King of Arms in London must be consulted for a definitive opinion. So the solution that I would now respectfully suggest to Your Lordship, *ad tempus*, is that My Lord Valentia shall carry the red flag at his maintop with a Saint George’s cross bordered with white superimposed upon the whole expanse of it, as your supernumerary chief deputy or vice-admiral, and My Lord Cromwell likewise a blue such flag at his maintop to signify that he is your supernumerary second-chief deputy or rear-admiral, and furthermore that...”

There was a sudden great rushing noise and a splintering crash above them, followed by a shower of debris falling past the cabin windows.

“Dear God!” Cecil cried, “What was that...? He called through the cabin door, “Captain Love, what is happening up there?”

After a while Love came into the great cabin, still white-faced and trembling from a cannon ball having recently passed close enough to knock him and those around him off their feet before smashing out a section of the taffrail.

“My lord, we must move away from the town. The Dons plainly have at least one cannon large enough to

touch us.”

“But you assured me that we were beyond shot...”

“Indeed I did, my lord. But evidently they have at least one piece large enough to touch us: most probably a long culverin which though it throws a ball of only twelve pounds or so, can throw it an exceedingly long way.”

“Are we in peril of being struck again?”

“I think they hit us only at a venture, because at so long a distance the aim is very uncertain. But so long as we sit here we will be a cock-shy for them. We must either enter the bay on the next tide or fall back to seaward. We thought we might engage them when we pleased. But they have just engaged us.”

At this point there was a noise of bos'un's whistles at the gangway as important visitors came aboard. It was the Jonker Willem and Doctor Reael, followed by Frans with his notebook tucked under his arm.

\*\*\*\*\*

Cadiz as I first saw it that midday from the *Geluckige Leeuw's* longboat was a town surrounded by high walls, whitewashed after the fashion of the Moors and with many turrets along them so that its appearance was very singular and quite unlike that of any town that I had ever seen before in Flanders or in England. Its situation, though, was humdrum enough, on a low island at the tip of the long

sandy isthmus that separates Cadiz Bay from the ocean. We came within four or five cable lengths of its walls, but at no great danger to ourselves (the boat's coxswain assured me) since we were well beyond musket shot. From time to time the Spaniards would fire off a great gun, and the bullet would plump into the sea three or four hundred yards short of the English vessels, and one or other of the English ships would then fire back at them with similar result. But this was only for bravado's sake, as two herring-wives will hurl abuse at one another *pro forma* from opposite ends of the fish quay without ever intending to come to blows. The Spaniards in the town were prudently husbanding their powder while observing us to see what it was that we intended. That is, if our captains themselves knew what it was that they intended, which was altogether somewhat debatable and the reason for our Dutch admirals going now to parley with them. For though our fleet had arrived off Cadiz the previous afternoon, it had made no attempt to enter the bay except for the Earl of Essex aboard the *Swiftsure*, who had gone in on the first of the flood and engaged the ships lying there, but finding that none followed him, had been obliged to let the enemy slip through his fingers and take refuge further up into the bay. Cadiz Bay itself, I saw (having consulted our Waghener's pilotage book, left lying on the cabin table after breakfast) was like a sack or poke, or a man's stomach in an anatomy book viewed posteriorly, and was about five miles across from east to west by three miles from north to south. The narrow sandy isthmus leading to Cadiz town separates it

from the ocean, and inside the bay the entrance or gullet is between the peninsula of the Trocadero on the mainland side, and a small promontory called Puntal on the isthmus. And on this low promontory a fort, called San Lorenzo de Puntal, stands to guard the entrance to the inner bay. The Bay of Cadiz itself is not at all any great spectacle to look at, since its shores on every side are low and marshy, and the water in it likewise too shallow for great ships except along a channel in the middle leading to Puerto Real and Carraca at its easternmost extremities, which was where the Spanish ships were now anchored beyond our reach, they having sunk blockships in the channels. Cadiz Bay is not a very commodious anchorage at all except that its location makes it so, there being no other or better haven along all that straight, sandy coast between Faro and Gibraltar.

We were nearing the *Ann Royal* as the cannon ball struck her. It was the first time I had witnessed a vessel under fire, since during our engagement with the Spanish frigate that summer I had spent the entire action below in the surgeon's cockpit. So though I was diverted by the sudden puff of smoke from the ramparts and the burning wad flying out of it, then the boom coming to us across the water, I did not associate the sudden rushing noise with any peril until I saw the *Ann's* taffrail suddenly fly in pieces with a loud crash and the ball splash into the water some way beyond, then heard a great noise of cheering and trumpets come to us across the water as the Spaniards saw they had touched their target. I then realised with a sudden chill that if they could hit the English flagship, then they could also

hit the longboat in which I now sat.

“So,” Doctor Reael remarked (who was surely no novice as regards the enemy’s fire), “Jan Spek has drawn first blood. Your Highness must urge these English blockheads to cease their dithering and decide whether they wish to take the town, or enter the bay, or take Puerto Santa María, or go home instead. For I see that the Spanish ships which lay here when we arrived are now well beyond our reach.”

“And what of that, Doctor Reael?” the Jonker Willem answered. “Surely we have them trapped in the bay and therefore hors de combat?”

“Indeed, Your Highness,” he said, “but we still have them at our backs to bother us. From my questioning of the Spanish fishermen we took this morning I learned that the ships here are mostly Neapolitans, while the Spanish main fleet lies either at Gibraltar or at Cartagena. If they come against us, then we might find ourselves caught between two fires: the Naples ships inside the bay and the Spanish ones outside it. Your Highness must be firm with Sir Edward, or Viscount Wimbleton or whatever he now calls himself, and insist that he makes his mind up, because as matters stand we are likely to find ourselves – if Your Highness will pardon the expression – with our arse between two stools and sitting on neither.”

Our stay aboard the *Ann Royal* was but a short one, it having already been decided by Sir Edward since the last council that, contrary to what we thought had been agreed there, Puerto Santa María was too shallow a haven to be useful to us (which I thought he might easily have

discovered by consulting a pilotage book, but the ways of generals were still new and mysterious to me). So the only course for us now, it seemed, was to enter Cadiz Bay and anchor there beyond reach of the town's guns, then put our soldiers ashore to march up the isthmus and take the town from landward. But Fort Puntal guarding the narrows would first have to be reduced; so it was agreed by Sir Edward and our admirals that a force of five Dutch fluit-ships and twenty English colliers would first bombard the place, the water thereabouts being too shallow for the great ships. That matter having been settled (or so we thought) we bade Sir Edward goodbye and climbed down to our longboat waiting alongside. As we were rowed back the Jonker Willem thanked me for my services.

“We are most grateful to you, Van Raveyck, for your assistance to us”, he said, “But for the time being we have no further need of your services, our business having now been decided with Viscount Wimbledon insofar as such a thing is possible. So we shall take you back to the *Eenhoorn*. Your ship will shortly see action against Fort Puntal, and you must be aboard her to assist her surgeon. But rest assured that we have not forgotten you, and will send for you again should the need arise. So please to accept this as a small token of our gratitude.” He then handed me a small gilt medallion of himself on a chain which I have to this day and treasure as a sign of princely favour; for though he himself was sadly slain two years after this at the siege of Grol, I still honour his memory as one possessed of that generosity and largeness of spirit which characterises great

captains, and think that had he lived, he might have gone on to perform deeds as notable as those of his father Prince Maurits. He then fell back to talking with the vice-admiral and I was forgotten, to be left with my thoughts touching the coming action.

Back aboard the *Eenhoorn* I changed into my sea-clothes in great haste and went below to assist my stepfather in making the surgeon's cockpit ready for the coming battle. The ship was now all a-bustle and clearing for action, a message having already been sent to our squadron that five of us were to attempt Puntal along with the English colliers: our own ship, the *Fortuijn*, the *Halve Maen*, the *Basilisk* and the *Pelikaan*. Our captain eagerly solicited from Doctor Reael the privilege of leading the assault, knowing that a successful action would greatly advance his credit and reputation even if it left half his crew dead. But the reply came back that the *Fortuijn* and the *Pelikaan* would sail up to Puntal first to reconnoitre: to see what the true depth of water was since this was by no means certain from the chart which had been drawn for us by an English wine merchant resident in Cadiz, a Mister Jenkinson, who claimed to know these waters like his own breeches pocket – though this was most questionable, and our captain said afterwards that like the back of his neck was nearer the truth.

So about six o'clock that evening, as it grew dark, the two fluit-ships ventured up towards Puntal on the flood tide and were warmly received, the *Fortuijn* stranding on a mud bank within range of the fort and being most grievously knocked about before the water rose enough to

float her off. Her skipper Captain Douwes was slain, his both legs being taken off above the knees by a cannon bullet so that he bled to death, and about thirty of her fellows were also killed, until the *Pelikaan*, as befits that most charitable bird, came up to cover her with her own fire, making the Spanish gunners keep their heads below the parapet while her men got a warp aboard the *Fortuijn* to tow her clear.

That night we lay at anchor off Cadiz town and awaited the coming day, which bade fair to be a hot one. Supper was served in the great cabin, with an empty place set at the table in memory of Captain Douwes, and all the fluit-ship skippers came aboard to confer about the morrow's action. There also sat down to sup with them an English army officer, one Captain John Palethorpe from the Earl of Denbigh's Regiment who had business aboard with Captain Neades since his bowmen, for want of any better employment – and I suppose to keep them out of harm's way – were to be assigned to the left flank of Captain Palethorpe's company. He was a Lincolnshire gentleman of cheerful ruddy countenance, about twenty-four or twenty-five years of age, who had already served three years as a lieutenant in the armies of the States-General and in consequence spoke pretty creditable Dutch, which was very singular in an Englishman since however long they served with us they mostly disdained to learn our language and expected us to learn theirs instead. The conversation over supper fell to our generals and their capacity or lack of it. To the great surprise of all present Mister Palethorpe –

perhaps feeling freer in Dutch than he would in his native tongue – frankly owned that our commanders were, in his opinion and that of the other regimental officers, no more than a collection of worn-out old boobies left over from Queen Elizabeth’s day and directed (insofar as any man directed them) by the Duke of Buckingham, whom he esteemed an entirely worthless person fit for nothing but to be a tailor’s mannequin, and who owed his present dignity only to having been King James’s catamite. Sir Edward Cecil (he said) had been chosen to lead this expedition merely by default, because King Charles could not decide between Sir Robert Mansell, who was advanced in years but a sea-officer and still energetic, and a younger but experienced land-officer like Sir Horace Vere or Ferdinando Fairfax. As to Sir James Bagg, who was Buckingham’s creature and had been charged by him with provisioning and fitting out this expedition, he roundly declared that the rogues whose carcasses presently decorated England’s gibbets were most of them hanged for lesser felonies than his. And touching the Earl of Essex, he said that there was much disquiet as to that noble lord’s fitness to command: that he was a peevish undecided fellow and though none knew any positive *harm* of him, yet the command of armies required more qualities than the mere absence of vices, otherwise any country curate or pious lady’s maid might equally well be appointed a general. He said likewise that it was widely rumoured in the army that Essex lacked the manly vigour that soldiering demands, having some ten years before had his marriage dissolved on grounds of its

non-consummation though his wife was as comely a baggage as could be wished (and mighty lascivious withal) and would surely cause the greatest eunuch that ever was to stand up and salute her. "Here," he said, "I shall sing you a ditty that was current then, and which is now much sung again in our messes". At which he took Suleiman's lute that lay on the side table, tuned it, and then (having some skill as a musician, and a fine tenor voice) sang us a most salacious catch entitled *Sweet Frances Howard of Hornchurch Town*, which my readers would surely blush to hear in full, but the chorus of which was:

"Sweet Frances Howard of Hornchurch town,  
Her shift went up but his yard hung down.  
A virgin still though a wife and a whore,  
Was ever the like of it seen before?"

And concluded with the lines

"Now back in Essex poor Bob doth chafe,  
And at his horns all men do laugh."

This bawdy song of his diverted the company not a little once Mister Palethorpe had translated the words for them, though Mister Neades (who was plainly of a more serious temper) looked pained throughout. But even so I think we were privately somewhat shocked and disconcerted that among our allies their disrespect – not to say contempt – for their commanders went so far as to touch upon such intimate matters. We Hollanders are also mighty satirical towards our great ones: not least because whereas in England a man may still be stood in the pillory and have his ears sliced off if his words displease the mighty,

in the Dutch provinces there is no such constraint from the law, and a libeller is at hazard only of receiving the libellee's rapier through his guts if a gentleman or being soundly cudgelled by his servants and tossed into a canal if of lower degree. Each year our printing presses disgorge hundreds of "spotprenten", which are droll commentaries in verse on our affairs and those of our neighbours and often very nicely illustrated by our finest engravers. But I never saw one of these that would debate whether Such-and-such was able to perform the marital devoir or not, and soon realised that where satires are concerned the English are unique among the nations in combining their dissidence with ribaldry. They are a folk that will tolerate any brutality or incompetence whatever in their rulers, provided only that they *look* like rulers; and conversely find nothing more contemptible in them than the appearance of lacking vigour. Yet from what we witnessed of the later conduct of that expedition, we were forced to admit that there might be something in the captain's song withal, and that fumbling incapacity in the service of Venus might indeed make King Charles's generals less than apt as votaries of Mars. For, as the English say, to fight and to fornicate are close cousins.

We were all up at three o'clock next morning as the tide turned, making ready to go up into the bay and resume our bombardment of Fort Puntal. To replace the *Fortuijn*, now so grievously battered as to be unserviceable and her crew taken off her, we were joined by the Zeeland ship the *Zeeridder* of Captain Johan Evertsen, who later won great

renown in the Republic's service and was slain in the Two Days' Battle against the English. We all of us felt no small trepidation, because we had seen the previous evening from the essay of the *Fortuijn* and the *Pelikaan* that though of small size, Puntal fort might prove a nut the cracking of which would cost us several broken teeth. But even so we were all eager to make a start on our work, waiting for battle to commence being the most trying of vigils. So our gunners lay to their guns, eight men to each, and saw that all was made ready that was requisite for the service of those bronze gods: round shot in the racks to hand; cartouches of powder and wadding placed ready; tubs of water for sponging out and for the lintstocks to be laid over when the slow-matches were lit. At four o'clock, though it was still dark, the vlotpredikant Dominie van Elst came aboard to conduct divine service because it was Sunday morning, and likewise to dispense us all from the sin of Sabbath-breaking, because (he said) there was God's work to be done and the Spaniards were notorious enemies of His elect nation, so that drubbing them of a Sunday morning was no sin and might even be considered meritorious in the Lord's sight.

It began to grow light, and the water being judged by now to have risen high enough above the muddy shoals of the bay, we weighed our anchor and moved up towards Puntal on the tide with a light westerly breeze filling our sails, in line ahead with the *Basilisk* leading and ourselves second, the *Zeeridder* astern of us and then the *Halve Maen* and the *Pelikaan* bringing up the rear. For my own part, I was not immediately required below, all things having been

made ready in the surgeon's cockpit, so our captain bade me come up on deck to convey his instructions to Mister Neades and his archers if the need should arise. The Englishmen were (he confessed to me) a great nuisance to him since we were the only ship of our squadron that was carrying land soldiers, there having been no opportunity yet to put them ashore. He had most earnestly counselled Captain Neades to keep his men below in the hold throughout the coming action, there being no advantage whatever in having them on deck, for if we were beyond musket shot what use would bows and arrows be against a fortress? But that gallant gentleman had insisted most vehemently that his men should be on deck to face the enemy's shot instead of skulking below like caitiffs while their Dutch hosts hazarded themselves to the Spaniard's fire. So with a sigh Captain Loodgieter had consented at last that if it pleased them so, and it did not hinder the working of the ship, then they should all stand drawn up in their ranks in the waist like so many skittles outside a tavern and have their foolish old heads knocked off to no purpose.

So as we sailed up towards Puntal in the first light of morning our pikemen-archers stood in the waist, drawn up in ranks in their corselets and gleaming helmets, with their pikes dressed with perfect perpendicularity and each of them as uniform and martial as though they had all been cast in green wax from the same mould. Mister Neades told me that it would be good for them and harden them, to face the enemy's fire even though they had no means of

returning it, for he said that for many of them it was a long time since they had last been in battle – by which I took him to mean “never” – and that while a soldier soon grows accustomed to the idea that men who have never met him actively seek his death, this is a disturbing conceit at first and better for them to get it over with now than later.

It was soon apparent to us that the Spaniards were up early as well, because as the *Basilisk*, which was about two cables’ distance ahead of us, came within range of Puntal the fort’s guns crashed out in welcome, the orange flame from the muzzles all the brighter in the half-darkness. The *Basilisk* replied with a rolling broadside of her ten guns on the starboard battery, and the Spaniards likewise. As the smoke drifted away on the breeze I saw in the dim light that Fort Puntal was what military engineers call a quadrangular sconce; which is to say a low, square structure about a hundred foot across, with a pentagonal bastion at each corner and embrasures below the parapet which gave two tiers of cannon: about sixteen or twenty pieces in all, we thought, though it was later revealed to us that the fort was being refitted when we arrived and had only eight pieces able to fire. It was built of brownish stone, not earth or brick, and it was plain likewise that it lay on a low sandy peninsula with a moat dug across it which would cut it off from the mainland at high tide, thus making it very troublesome to be taken from landward (which we supposed to be Sir Edward’s intention) until low water, which would be about five o’ clock that afternoon. Having discharged her guns the *Basilisk* sailed on past the fort, and

we came up, matches lit and cannon ready to fire. Our captain up on the poop turned to the mate and said

“Meester Hendrickssen, do you see any sign of our allies?”

Our mate peered astern, past the three vessels that followed us, and replied “Neither hide nor hair of them, skipper. What’s become of the lazy dogs? You said that there were twenty of them promised to join us.”

“Indeed I did: this was firmly agreed yesterday between our admirals and Viscount Wimbledon at their meeting. The Jonker Willem sent a note afterwards to inform me of it. So what are they doing? Do they still lie abed in honour of Sunday morning?” Then he shrugged and turned back to the business in hand. “Anyway, colliers or no colliers, we are here now and each of us must do his best. We shall pound Jan Spek as best we can, and hope only that Jan Engelschman will see fit to join the party later on. Make ready to fire!”

We drew level with the fort, and as its guns banged out so did ours, in a broadside that made the whole ship to tremble: not a sudden single thunderclap but a leisurely rolling of detonations as the captain had instructed the master gunner; not each gun captain applying his match to the touch-hole when he saw the piece to right of him leap backwards as was the custom when engaging another ship, but each to count up to five then discharge his cannon so that the entire broadside lasted a minute or more and the fellows towards the stern were already reloading as the forward-most gun gave fire. As for the enemy’s shots at us,

we perceived that they were more disordered now and worse-aimed than those they had fired at the *Basilisk*, so that one knocked out a piece of the fret beneath our beakhead and another hit the side well aft, while another aimed too high tore a rent in the mizzen sail and passed on with a great roaring noise, but most of their bullets merely splashed in the water about us. For myself, standing there beside our skipper, it was as Mister Neades had predicted a most disagreeable reflection at first that the bullet that had just ripped through the sail twenty feet above my head would infallibly, if aimed a half-degree or so lower, have knocked me all to bloody gobbets; and myself a surgeon's mate withal, with no more mortal weapon about my person than a fleam in my pocket for letting blood. But as Mister Neades had likewise predicted, the sensation quickly passed, and it seemed before long quite normal to me and perfectly comprehensible that those unseen rascals in the fort over there should be seeking to kill me though I had never offered them the smallest offence. And throughout all this din and peril our English bowmen stood like so many statues in the waist, never flinching even when shot whizzed overhead, until I think that their rheumatically old calves must have grown tired with the standing.

Our starboard battery discharged and we having received (we ascertained) but small hurt in return, we sailed on past Puntal as our gunners reloaded, then ran the starboard guns in and shut and barred the port-lids since to have more gunports than necessary open during an action is always hazardous. About ten cables beyond the fort, as the

*Zeeridder* fired at it, we put up our helm and went about. The wind blew steady from the west, so we could proceed past the fort on the starboard tack while discharging our starboard battery, then turn and pass back the other way on the larboard tack giving them the benefit of the guns on that side. This was the *modus operandi* that our captains had agreed the previous evening aboard the *Eenhoorn*: that each ship would begin firing as the vessel ahead ceased, and those coming back on the larboard tack likewise; and in this way Fort Puntal would be steadily battered over several hours or as long as it took to reduce the place; not with a sudden hurricane of shot from all our ships at once, which might only serve to inflame the courage and martial ardour of the defenders, but rather with a steady drizzle of fire to dampen it, each ship in its turn sousing the fort in passing like drunkards pissing against a stone outside a tavern, and in this manner subject their courage and mood to slow attrition, as a steady drip will wear away a stone more efficaciously than a sudden torrent.

Despite the danger to my person (which was most likely not very great so long as our ship kept moving and did not run aground like the unfortunate *Fortuijn*) I must confess that this first real battle that I had witnessed was a mighty imposing spectacle: the thundering of the cannon, the sulphurous white smoke, the flying banners all gaily coloured that fluttered from our mastheads, the red “bloedvlag” at the stern which our Dutch ships would hoist when going into battle as a sign of their earnest; and above all this the shrilling of trumpets and rat-tattling of drums

which we kept up to encourage our own fellows and dishearten the enemy. And so this noisy pageant continued all the morning, our five vessels (for there was still no sign of the English colliers) discharging broadside after broadside at Fort Puntal, whose own guns had by now fallen silent, though they still loosed off a shot now and then to show us that they were not entirely reduced. As the tide rose Essex's *Swiftsure* came up with us and being too deep to come close in to the fort, dropped anchor with a spring-cable at her stern to manoeuvre herself and added her fire to ours, though more to hearten us than anything else since she was too far distant for it to have much effect. Yet as we came close at each pass and the smoke cleared I perceived that though it was now almost noon and the top of the tide, and we had fired off (by my computation) close on two thousand shots between us, yet still the little fort remained largely intact: a corner of wall knocked off here and there and the parapet edges somewhat dilapidated, and shot-marks on the walls, but the main structure still solid and intact as ever, which was very curious to me because I had always been told by the military wisecracks and alehouse strategists who abound alike in Flanders and in England that stone walls would not stand up to cannon and that only earth (by its softness) or brickwork (by its close-knit texture) would resist being battered by cannonfire without crumbling away to rubble. But this fort was patently built of stone, yet it seemed of adamantine toughness and utterly resistant to all that we might hurl against it, which I found most troublesome to account for.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was seven o'clock in the morning aboard the *Ann Royal*. As the guns flashed and thundered a mile away divine service was being celebrated by the fleet chaplain Doctor Brundell, the seamen and soldiers drawn up in their ranks in the waist and Sir Edward and his officers on the quarterdeck above them to hear the Bible reading (Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 7, concerning obedience to lawful rulers) and to bellow out the psalms with the rest, then hear the doctor's sermon – likewise on obedience to lawful rulers – then take communion. The same scene was being enacted by Doctor Brundell's curates aboard all the king's ships, so Cadiz Bay was filled for the while by the sounds of an English Sunday morning as the defenders on the ramparts gazed across the water at them: impotently now that the English vessels had prudently withdrawn beyond the reach of the long culverin *Juanita* which had knocked a corner off their flagship the previous day. In Cadiz town too the aid of God was being invoked: or in this case Deo, assisted by La Virgene María and her son, and Todos los Santos for good measure. And men who might be dead or maimed by nightfall were being assured just like their English counterparts of the perfect divine justice of their cause, and therefore how pleasing an offering to the deity their own death or mutilation would be. Down

the steps of the cathedral, surrounded by the smoke of incense, swaying precariously on her bier borne on the shoulders of barefoot members of the Brotherhood of Penitents in their pointed hoods, the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary began her journey around the town's narrow, malodorous streets before crowds of soldiers and townspeople who knelt in the filth and crossed themselves at her approach. And behind her, also borne on poles resting on the shoulders of his attendants, came the Blessed Virgin Mary's local agent Don Fernando de Girón in half-armour (though the weight of it plagued his gouty old joints more than he could well describe), raising his hand in acknowledgement of the blessings and encouragement that came from all sides.

The procession, though, was merely to put heart into the people: the real work had already been done without the assistance of the Virgin Mary or the communion of saints. All the previous night under cover of darkness the galleys had been plying to and fro across the bay between Cadiz and Puerto Santa María ferrying soldiers across a hundred at a time, and barrels of powder and kegs of musket balls, their oars creaking as their stems sliced through the calm waters, the manacles of their sweating slaves chinking in rhythmical chorus punctuated by the crack of the guarda-chusma's whips – for the rowers were becoming tired – and yelps of pain from those whose backs were licked by them. It puzzled Girón that the English had made no attempt to interfere with this traffic across the bay, which had already raised the strength of the town's garrison

from four hundred to nearly three thousand men. But the English (all men knew) were a strange people and their actions – or in this case, the lack of them – entirely inscrutable to rational beings. For his own part, though he regarded himself as an upright and honourable man, Don Fernando had likewise been a soldier long enough not to have any scruples about profiting from an enemy's folly and negligence. So in his heart he now joined the townsfolk in thanking the Blessed Virgin Mary, protectress of all Catholics and likewise Saint James of Compostella, patron saint of Spain, for having answered his prayers and smitten King Philip's enemies not with blindness or boils but with that strange paralysis of the will which in Spanish is called "abulia".

Halfway through Doctor Brundell's sermon aboard the *Ann Royal* there was a commotion at the gangway. The master-at-arms came up and whispered to Sir Edward that a boat from the *Geluckige Leeuw* had just come alongside bringing the Jonker Willem van Nassau, who urgently desire to speak with him. Sir Edward excused himself and hurried aft just in time to meet the Jonker Willem coming aboard followed by two of his aides. The princeling had no interpreter with him this time, so he spoke in French which Sir Edward (though he was fluent in Italian) understood but with a hop and a skip, having not studied that language since his far-distant schooldays. He made a bow of a depth appropriate to the Jonker Willem's princely rank, but the Dutchman did not return it. He was plainly much agitated.

"Milord de Wimbledon, il faut que je parle avec vous –

en urgence!

“Erm...naturellemente... je serais enchanté de obligare Vestra Altesse. And in what might I be of service to you?”

“Sir Edward, what is the meaning of this? Our Dutch ships have already been engaged with the enemy for two hours, yet there is still not a sign of the English collier vessels you promised to aid them. They have not so much as raised anchor, les lâches, and while Dutchmen shed their blood in this common enterprise you English stand singing your psalms as though you were still lying at anchor in Plymouth Sound. C’est pas honnête de vôtre part, pour le moins dire...”

Sir Edward understood barely the half of all this, but still saw that the young nobleman was highly displeased and fairly beside himself with anger.

“Er...je ne connais pas niente de tout cela. Pray be patient, my good prince...” He turned to Captain Love, who had by now joined him. “Sir Thomas, His Highness says that the ships we promised him yesterday for reducing Puntal are still riding at anchor and have not budged. Please to get a boat ready at once, that I may go and discover the meaning of this. And which are the vessels guilty of this dereliction, so that I may convene a court-martial for their captains?”

“I regret, my lord, but I have no knowledge of that: Captain Argall of the *Swiftsure* was appointed to detail which colliers would take part. And the *Swiftsure*, as your lordship will observe, has already weighed anchor and gone up into the bay on the tide. So we must go and interrogate

each of the colliers in turn to discover whether they received such orders from him, and if so why they have ignored them.”

So Sir Edward clambered down into the longboat with Captain Love and was rowed out across the early-morning water to the colliers, which were anchored a half-mile off, over in the shallows towards the Trocadero peninsula. They arrived to find the ships half awake, with that somnolent air of vessels lying in harbour early on a Sunday morning, for all the world as though the smoke and banging of gunfire less than a mile distant was no concern of theirs whatever. Sir Edward stood up in the stern sheets, sword in hand and red silken general's sash draped about his gorget and breastplate.

“Ho there! I would speak with the captain of this vessel.” The mate of the collier-ship *Amity* of Middlesborough looked down at his visitors and continued to smoke his clay pipe, then took it out of his mouth at last.

“And who might you be when you're at home, sir?”

“How dare you address me thus, you insolent dog! I am Sir Edward Cecil, Viscount Wimbledon; His Majesty King Charles's lieutenant-general and commander of this expedition. Bring me your captain at once, or it'll be the worse for you!”

The mate scratched himself. “Begging your pardon: no offence intended.” Then he strolled aft to the cabin and roused Captain William Skipwith from his sleep. “Skipper: there's a zany-headed fellow come alongside in a boat waving a sword and says as how he's the Fly-Hound

Bimblebum or Bumble-bee or some such nonsense. He says he wants to speak with you.”

The captain tumbled out of his bunk, groaning and tousled, and came forward to the gangway.

“What’s all this commotion. Can’t a man even lie in of a Sunday morning?”

“Are you the master of this ship?”

“Aye: happen I am.”

“Then why have you not moved up to assist the Dutch vessels that currently bombard Fort Puntal?”

“Because no man ever told me that I should. We were instructed by the *Swiftsure* to drop anchor here on Friday evening, and not a word since. I reckon you must be wanting the *Bonaventure*: a boat came alongside them yesterday in the first dog watch, so it must be them as received the instruction and not us.”

“Where are they?” Sir Edward demanded.

Skipwith pointed to a group of colliers anchored about two cable-lengths away . “More than likely it’s that lot over there. For our part, if no one tells us to sling our hook and move, then it concerns us no more than last year’s snow if the Butter-Boxes wish to spend Sabbath morning cracking their skulls against the walls of a fort. By all accounts those blackguards lately used our fellows uncommonly ill at Amboyna in the Indies. So if they wish to make amends now by fighting the Spaniard for us then I think that only fitting reparation. I bid you good-day now, sir, for my breakfast awaits me”

Spluttering with rage (though he was not naturally a

choleric man) Sir Edward was rowed across to the other colliers, where he received much the same reception: denials of ever having been given any such order, and directions to go and speak with someone else if he would be any the wiser concerning it. By the time he had questioned his third lot of collier captains Sir Edward was in a fine fury, inveighing against “these pusillanimous wretches that take the king’s coin and eat his bread, but refuse to move a finger in vindication of his honour”, and assuring each skipper in turn, sword in hand, that if he did not weigh anchor forthwith and move up towards Puntal he would infallibly be court martialled and hanged from the *Ann Royal’s* yardarm for mutiny and dereliction of duty and afterwards left there for the fowls of the air to devour like Pharoah’s baker. Yet after he had rowed on not a single vessel moved from her station, and Captain Love’s pencilled list of defaulters contained several such entries as “*The collier-ship Whim-Wham of Gotham: master Captain Robin Hood*” and “*The collier-ship The Moon of Coventry: master Captain Mann*”. In the end only the king’s ships of Essex’s squadron moved up on the tide to support the Dutch. And likewise – though no one had given order for her to do so – the Hartlepool collier *Great Sapphire* of the red squadron came up about eight o’clock to join the party, her master Captain Raymond declaring that it was great shame that Englishmen should lie in their bunks while Dutchmen shed their blood in a common venture; for all that he could see that was common about it was that the Hollanders (whom he greatly respected, his adored wife Saskia being of that

nation) should be graciously allowed to push the cart up the hill, while the English would push it down the other side. He took his ship in even closer to the fort than the Dutch vessels, and was killed about midday along with his mate Master Kenton by one of the last shots that the Spaniards fired, both smitten dead by the wind of the ball passing between them as they stood together on the poop deck. Which was a sad end for so gallant a seaman who had demonstrated that though of lowly degree he was still not insensible to the call of honour.