RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Captain Blood

Rafael Sabatini

CONTENTS

About the Book

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY KATE MOSSE

Wrongfully arrested following the Monmouth rebellion of 1685, Peter Blood, country physician and former soldier, escapes the hangman’s noose only to be exiled to the tropical colonies. Sold into slavery to a cruel plantation owner, his moral fortitude and medical ability soon earn him the favour of the island’s governor, and the attentions of Arabella, his master’s niece. When the town is attacked by marauding Spanish buccaneers, Blood springs to the rescue, and with a motley yet loyal band of shipmates escapes to begin a life of noble piracy and adventure on the caribbean seas.

A classic swashbuckling tale of piracy, romance and redemption, *Captain Blood* stands as one the greatest adventure novels of the 20th century.

About the Author

Rafael Sabatini was born in Jesi, Italy in 1875 to an English mother and an Italian father, both renowned opera singers. Sabatini travelled extensively as a child, and could speak six languages fluently by the age of seventeen. After a brief stint in the business world, he turned to writing. He worked prolifically, writing short stories in the 1890s, with his first novel published in 1902. *Scaramouche* was published in 1921 to widespread acclaim, and was soon followed by the equally successful *Captain Blood*. Rafael Sabatini died on 13 February 1950 in Switzerland.

Also by Rafael Sabatini

The Lovers of Yvonne
The Tavern Knight
Bardelys the Magnificent
The Trampling of the Lilies
Love-at-Arms
The Shame of Motley
St. Martin's Summer
Mistress Wilding
The Lion's Skin
The Strolling Saint
The Gates of Doom
The Sea Hawk
The Snare
Scaramouche
Fortune's Fool
The Carolinian
Bellarion the Fortunate
The Hounds of God
The Romantic Prince
The King's Minion
Scaramouche the Kingmaker
The Black Swan
The Stalking Horse
Venetian Masque
Chivalry
The Lost King
The Sword of Islam
The Marquis of Carabas
Columbus
King in Prussia
The Gamester

RAFAEL SABATINI

Captain Blood

His Odyssey

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

GENTLEMAN AND PIRATE

Linguist, gentleman, businessman, storyteller, Rafael Sabatini is one of the unsung masters of Pirate Fiction. Although *Captain Blood* was by no means the first pirate novel – that honour probably goes to Defoe's 1720 *Captain Singleton* – it is one of the classics of the genre. Without Sabatini, Errol Flynn would not have captured the silver screen. Without Sabatini, Disney may well not have designed a walk-through pirate attraction at its theme parks – which, in its turn, many years later, was to inspire the blockbuster series of films, *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Sabatini was of the generation of the great adventure novelists H. Rider Haggard and Jules Verne, and ghostly storytellers, M. R. James and Algernon Blackwood. Born in Italy in 1875, the son of two opera singers, an English mother and an Italian father, Sabatini's early life was marked by wandering. He lived in Italy, England, Portugal and Switzerland. By the time he returned to settle permanently in England in 1892, he spoke six languages. The smatterings of French, Spanish and Italian in his novels are testament to the ease with which he moves between cultures, national characteristics and personalities, although Sabatini chose to write in the language of his adopted country because, as he put it, 'all the best stories are written in English'.

As an author, Sabatini was very much of his time in the sense that he worked hard, 'laboring in the word mines' as Margaret Atwood puts it in *Negotiating with the Dead*. Over his career, he produced thirty-one novels, eight short-story collections, six works of non-fiction, numerous uncollected short stories and a play. But his reputation rests on just a fragment of his output – three great adventure novels – *The Sea Hawk* (1915), *Scaramouche* (1921), his brilliant novel of the French Revolution, and the novel which you hold now in your hands.

By the time *Captain Blood* was first published in 1922, pirates as stock-in-trade characters were well established both on the page and on stage. Often based on the lives – albeit idealised – of 'real' pirates, they were popular, enduring, romantic figures. In 1713, *The Successful Pirate* – loosely modelled on the life of English buccaneer Henry Avery, who'd made his fortune capturing a treasure ship in the Indian Ocean – was performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London. It was the first in a long line of popular pirate melodramas, including *Blackbeard* (or *The Captive Princess*), which opened at the Royal Circus, Lambeth in 1798 and was still running well into the middle of the next century.

The age of Victorian expansion led to a new appetite for thrilling stories and tales of adventures on the high seas. Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance* premiered on New Year's Eve in New York 1879 to riotously good reviews. When it opened in London a few months later, at the Opera Comique, such was the public appetite for pirate tales that it ran for 363 performances. The most loved stage pirate is perhaps Captain Hook of J. M. Barrie's play (and later novel) *Peter Pan*, which opened in London in December 1904. Meanwhile, the book-reading audience was also devouring adventure and piratical stories, from Walter Scott's 1822 publication *The Pirate* and R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* in 1857 to Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* – published in instalments between 1844 and 1846 – and, of course, Robert Louis Stevenson's classic *Treasure Island* in 1883. By the time of the appearance of *Captain Blood*, tales of piracy, romance and adventure held a permanent place in the public heart.

Sabatini understood absolutely the importance of a strong protagonist, and not least that he must *deserve* to overcome adversity. He – and in these classic adventures novels it is almost always he – must be of good moral character even when acting outside the law. Often, his fight against injustice requires him to sacrifice his own happiness (in the short term, at least) for the good of others. Of course, the tale would be dull if the hero was worthy rather than witty, eager rather than reluctant. He must be as good with words as with a sword, self-deprecating as well as honourable. Captain Blood is all these things. He's a Dick Turpin of the High Seas, a seafaring version of Baroness Orczy's The Scarlet Pimpernel, a Caribbean Zorro.

As befits his own peripatetic childhood, Sabatini's hero is a man of all nations and slave to none. From the opening line – 'Peter Blood, bachelor of medicine and several other things besides, smoked a pipe and tended the geraniums boxed on the sill of his window above Water Lane in the town of Bridgewater.' – we know Blood is different, his own man, pragmatic and even-handed, a man capable of not taking sides. Unfortunately the year is 1685 and Blood's dreams of a quiet life are blown out of the water when he is convicted of treason for tending a wounded rebel fighting for the Duke of Monmouth against King James II. Saved from the hangman's noose at the Assizes only by his quick wit, there follows transportation on a slave ship to Barbados; escape from slavery and the brutal plantation owner, Colonel Bishop, during a Spanish pirate attack; the start of Blood's own career as a pirate and, finally, his redemption. In this, Blood's fictional life bears more than a passing resemblance to the seventeenth-century real-life castaway surgeon Henry Pitman. An employee of the rebel Duke of Monmouth, Pitman wrote a short book about his desperate escape from a Caribbean penal colony, followed by his shipwrecking and subsequent desert island misadventures. (As an aside, the novelist and travel writer Tim Severin suggests in his 2002 book, *Seeking Robinson Crusoe*, that Pitman's life might have been the inspiration for Daniel Defoe's 1719 character, rather than Alexander Selkirk.)

But whether Sabatini was or was not inspired by Henry Pitman's story hardly matters. *Captain Blood* continues to charm because Blood is so engaging a literary character. He is witty, charming, thoughtful, self-doubting; a hero of necessity, not choice; a hero in the mould of H. Rider Haggard's Allan Quatermain. He is the champion of those 'who feel themselves at war with humanity' but who have yet 'some rags of honour'. And although his pirate crew are, as he puts it, 'robbers of the sea', there is a code. As in all good adventure stories, there are good outlaws and bad.

This moral centre is the key to the novel's enduring success and why it deserves to capture the hearts of a new generation of readers. Blood is a man who knows right from wrong. His fictional biography sits squarely in the tradition of the great American novels of the twentieth century, the towering works of Toni Morrison or Alice Walker or Ernest Hemingway (whose first novel was, in fact, a pirate story). Beneath the bish, bash, bosh of the adventure, *Captain Blood* is a novel about the iniquities of society, of how men and women are criminalised and ill-treated, through no fault of their own. How a fugitive, a felon – like Victor Hugo's Jean Valjean, branded by his convict's yellow passport – might be left with no choice. It is about how good men (there are few women here) might become bad or despairing. About how easy it is for society to reject the outsider out of hand.

Many classic novels are read with an affectionate, indulgent eye. For the sake of long acquaintance, we overlook overwriting or predictability. We forgive passages that might be too rich, too swollen, too clichéd for our modern tastes for the sake of the story and the tradition of the tale. No such allowances are necessary with *Captain Blood*. Occasionally, the style is a little clunky, and the final chapter, when justice is dispensed with honour and decency, is a little ‘wham, bam, thank you ma’am’ – but the tale is told in both spare and vigorous prose, never breathless, and punctuated with classy phrases, such as when a ‘dull, spiritless resignation settled upon the slaves in Carlisle Bay’ or ‘the executioners were kept busy with rope and chopper and cauldrons of pitch’. There are exquisite descriptions too – the realisation of exotic landscapes being another ingredient to successful adventure writing – but, beyond the requirements of the genre, Sabatini is a craftsman. Raids, sea battles, sword fights, acts of gallantry and low cunning abound – chapter after chapter of action, recounted with zest and skill by an elegant, natural-born storyteller.

Sabatini died in 1950, having never repeated the success of his earlier novels, and was buried in Adelboden, in Switzerland. Fashions change, times change. On his headstone is engraved the famous first line of *Scaramouche*: ‘He was born with a gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad.’ A fitting epitaph for a writer who was, in literary terms, the stuff of which swashbuckling heroes are made.

Kate Mosse
Sussex, January 2009

CHAPTER I

THE MESSENGER

PETER BLOOD, BACHELOR of medicine and several other things besides, smoked a pipe and tended the geraniums boxed on the sill of his window above Water Lane in the town of Bridgewater.

Sternly disapproving eyes considered him from a window opposite, but went disregarded. Mr. Blood's attention was divided between his task and the stream of humanity in the narrow street below; a stream which poured for the second time that day in the direction of Castle Field, where earlier in the afternoon, Ferguson, the Duke's chaplain, had preached a sermon containing more treason than divinity.

These straggling excited groups were mainly composed of men with green boughs in their hats and the most ludicrous of weapons in their hands. Some, it is true, shouldered fowling pieces, and here and there a sword was brandished; but more of them were armed with clubs, and most of them trailed the mammoth pikes fashioned out of scythes, as formidable to the eye as they were clumsy to the hand. There were weavers, brewers, carpenters, smiths, masons, bricklayers, cobblers and representatives of every other of the trades of peace among these improvised men of war. Bridgewater, like Taunton, had yielded so generously of its manhood to the service of the bastard Duke that for any to abstain whose age and strength admitted of his bearing arms was to brand himself a coward or a papist.

Yet Peter Blood, who was not only able to bear arms, but trained and skilled in their use, who was certainly no coward, and a papist only when it so suited him, tended his geraniums and smoked his pipe on that warm July evening as indifferently as if nothing were afoot. One other thing he did. He flung after those war-fevered enthusiasts a line of Horace – a poet for whose work he had early conceived an inordinate affection.

'Quo, quo, scelesti, ruitis?'

And now perhaps you guess why the hot, intrepid blood inherited from the roving sires of his Somersetshire mother remained cool amidst all this frenzied fanatical heat of rebellion; why the turbulent spirit which had forced him once from the sedate academical bonds his father would have imposed upon him, should now remain quiet in the very midst of turbulence. You realise how he regarded these men who were rallying to the banners of liberty – the banners woven by the virgins of Taunton, the girls from the seminaries of Miss Blake and Mrs. Musgrove, who – as the ballad runs – had ripped open their silk petticoats to make colours for King Monmouth's army. That Latin line contemptuously flung after them as they clattered down the cobbled streets reveals his mind. To him they were fools rushing in wicked frenzy upon their ruin.

You see, he knew too much about this fellow Monmouth and the pretty brown slut who had borne him, to be deceived by the legend of legitimacy, on the strength of which this standard of rebellion had been raised. He had read the absurd proclamation posted at the Cross at Bridgewater – as it had been posted also at Taunton and elsewhere – setting forth that 'upon the decease of our Sovereign Lord Charles the Second, the right of succession to the Crown of England, Scotland, France and Ireland with the dominions and territories thereunto belonging, did legally descend and devolve upon the most illustrious and high-born Prince James Duke of Monmouth, son and heir-apparent to the said King Charles the Second.'

It had moved him to laughter, as had the further announcement that 'James Duke of York did first cause the said late King to be poysoned, and immediately thereupon did usurp and invade the Crown.'

He knew not which was the greater lie. For Mr. Blood had spent a third of his life in the Netherlands, where this same James Scott – who now proclaimed himself James the Second, by the Grace of God, King, et cetera – first saw the light some six-and-thirty years ago, and he was acquainted with the story current there of the fellow's real paternity. Far from being legitimate – by virtue of a pretended secret marriage between Charles Stuart and Lucy Walter – it was possible that this Monmouth who now proclaimed himself King of England was not even the illegitimate child of the late sovereign. What but ruin and disaster could be the end of this grotesque pretension? How could it be hoped that England should ever swallow such a Perkin? And it was on his behalf, to uphold his fantastic claim, that these West Country clods, led by a few armigerous Whigs, had been seduced into rebellion!

'Quo, quo, scelesti, ruitis?'

He laughed and sighed in one; but the laugh dominated the sigh, for Mr. Blood was unsympathetic, as are most self-sufficient men; and he was very self-sufficient, adversity had taught him so to be. A more tenderhearted man, possessing his vision and his knowledge, might have found cause for tears in the contemplation of these ardent, simple Nonconformist sheep going forth to the shambles – escorted to the rallying ground on Castle Field by wives and daughters, sweethearts and mothers, sustained by the delusion that they were to take the field in defence of Right, of Liberty and of Religion. For he knew, as all Bridgewater knew and had known now for some hours, that it was Monmouth's intention to deliver battle that same night. The Duke was to lead a surprise attack upon the Royalist army under Feversham that was now encamped on Sedgemoor. Mr. Blood thought it very probable that Lord Feversham was equally well-informed, and if in this assumption he was wrong, at least he was justified of it. He was not to suppose the Royalist commander so indifferently skilled in the trade he followed.

Mr. Blood knocked the ashes from his pipe, and drew back to close his window. As he did so, his glance travelling straight across the street met at last the glance of those hostile eyes that watched him. There were two pairs, and they belonged to the Misses Pitt, two amiable, sentimental maiden ladies who yielded to none in Bridgewater in their worship of the handsome Monmouth.

Mr. Blood smiled and inclined his head, for he was on friendly terms with these ladies, one of whom, indeed, had been for a little while his patient. But there was no response to his greeting. Instead, the eyes gave him back a stare of cold disdain. The smile on his thin lips grew a little broader, a little less pleasant. He understood the reason of that hostility, which had been daily growing in this past week since Monmouth had come to turn the brains of women of all ages. The Misses Pitt, he apprehended, contemned him that he, a young and vigorous man, of a military training which might now be valuable to the cause, should stand aloof, that he should placidly smoke his pipe and tend his geraniums on this evening of all evenings when men of spirit were rallying to the Protestant Champion, offering their blood to place him on the throne where he belonged.

If Mr. Blood had condescended to debate the matter with these ladies, he might have urged that having had his fill of wandering and adventuring, he was now embarked upon the career for which he had been originally intended and for which his studies had equipped him; that he was a man of medicine and not of war; a healer, not a slayer. But they would have answered him, he knew, that in such a cause it behoved every man who deemed himself a man to take up arms. They would have pointed out that their own nephew, Jeremiah, who *was* by trade a sailor, the master of a ship – which by an ill-chance for that young man had come to anchor at this season in Bridgewater Bay – had quitted the helm to snatch up a musket in defence of Right. But Mr. Blood was not of those who argue. As I have said, he was a self-sufficient man.

He closed the window, drew the curtains, and turned to the pleasant candle-lighted room, and the table on which Mrs. Barlow, his housekeeper, was in the very act of spreading supper. To her, however, he spoke aloud his thought.

'It's out of favour I am with the vinegary virgins over the way.'

He had a pleasant, vibrant voice, whose metallic ring was softened and muted by the Irish accent which in all his wanderings he had never lost. It was a voice that could woo seductively and caressingly, or command in such a way as to compel obedience. Indeed, the man's whole nature was in that voice of his. For the rest of him, he was tall and spare, swarthy of tint as a gipsy, with eyes that were startlingly blue in that dark face and under those level black brows. In their glance those eyes, flanking a high-bridged intrepid nose, were of singular penetration and of a steady haughtiness that went well with his firm lips. Though dressed in black as became his calling, yet it was with an elegance derived from the love of clothes that is peculiar to the adventurer he had been, rather than to the staid medicus he now was. His coat was of fine camlet, and it was laced with silver; there were ruffles of Mechlin at his wrists and a Mechlin cravat encased his throat. His great black periwig was as sedulously curled as any at Whitehall.

Seeing him thus, and perceiving his real nature, which was plain upon him, you might have been tempted to speculate how long such a man would be content to lie by in this little backwater of the world into which chance had swept him some six months ago; how long he would continue to pursue the trade for which he had qualified himself before he had begun to live. Difficult of belief though it may be when you know his history, previous and subsequent, yet it is possible that but for the trick that Fate was about to play him, he might have continued this peaceful existence, settling down completely to the life of a doctor in this Somersetshire haven. It is possible, but not probable.

He was the son of an Irish medicus, by a Somersetshire lady in whose veins ran the rover blood of the Frobishers, which may account for a certain wildness that had early manifested itself in his disposition. This wildness had profoundly alarmed his father, who for an Irishman was of a singularly peace-loving nature. He had early resolved that the boy should follow his own honourable profession, and Peter Blood being quick to learn and oddly greedy of knowledge had satisfied his parent by receiving at the age of twenty the degree of baccalaureus medicinæ at Trinity College, Dublin. His father survived that satisfaction by three months only. His mother had then been dead some years already. Thus Peter Blood came into an inheritance of some few hundred pounds, with which he had set out to see the world and give for a season a free rein to that restless spirit by which he was imbued. A set of curious chances led him to take service with the Dutch, then at war with France; and a predilection for the sea made him elect that this service should be upon that element. He had the advantage of a commission under the famous de Ruyter, and fought in the Mediterranean engagement in which that great Dutch admiral lost his life.

After the Peace of Nimeguen his movements are obscure. But we know that he spent two years in a Spanish prison, though we do not know how he contrived to get there. It may be due to this that upon his release he took his sword to France, and saw service with the French in their warring upon the Spanish Netherlands. Having reached, at last, the age of thirty-two, his appetite for adventure surfeited, his health having grown indifferent as the result of a neglected wound, he was suddenly overwhelmed by home-sickness. He took ship from Nantes with intent to cross to Ireland. But the vessel being driven by stress of weather into Bridgewater Bay, and Blood's health having grown worse during the voyage, he decided to go ashore there, additionally urged to it by the fact that it was his mother's native soil.

Thus in January of that year 1685 he had come to Bridgewater, possessor of a fortune that was approximately the same as that with which he had originally set out from Dublin eleven years ago.

Because he liked the place, in which his health was rapidly restored to him, and because he conceived that he had passed through adventures enough for a man's lifetime, he determined to settle there, and take up at last the profession of medicine from which he had, with so little profit, broken away.

That is all his story, or so much of it as matters up to that night, six months later, when the battle of Sedgemoor was fought.

Deeming the impending action no affair of his, as indeed it was not, and indifferent to the activity with which Bridgewater was that night agog, Mr. Blood closed his ears to the sounds of it, and went early to bed. He was peacefully asleep long before eleven o'clock, at which hour, as you know, Monmouth rode out with his rebel host along the Bristol Road, circuitously to avoid the marshland that lay directly between himself and the Royal Army. You also know that his numerical advantage – possibly counterbalanced by the greater steadiness of the regular troops on the other side – and the advantages he derived from falling by surprise upon an army that was more or less asleep, were all lost to him by blundering and bad leadership before ever he was at grips with Feversham.

The armies came into collision in the neighbourhood of two o'clock in the morning. Mr. Blood slept undisturbed through the distant boom of cannon. Not until four o'clock, when the sun was rising to dispel the last wisps of mist over that stricken field of battle, did he awaken from his tranquil slumbers.

He sat up in bed, rubbed the sleep from his eyes, and collected himself. Blows were thundering upon the door of his house, and a voice was calling incoherently. This was the noise that had aroused him. Conceiving that he had to do with some urgent obstetrical case, he reached for bedgown and slippers, to go below. On the landing, he almost collided with Mrs. Barlow, new risen and unsightly, in a state of panic. He quieted her cluckings with a word of reassurance, and went himself to open.

There in the slanting golden light of the new-risen sun stood a breathless, wild-eyed man and a steaming horse. Smothered in dust and grime, his clothes in disarray, the left sleeve of his doublet hanging in rags, this young man opened his lips to speak, yet for a long moment remained speechless.

In that moment Mr. Blood recognised him for the young shipmaster, Jeremiah Pitt, the nephew of the maiden ladies opposite, one who had been drawn by the general enthusiasm into the vortex of that rebellion. The street was rousing, awakened by the sailor's noisy advent; doors were opening, and lattices were being unlatched for the protrusion of anxious inquisitive heads.

'Take your time, now,' said Mr. Blood. 'I never knew speed made by overhaste.'

But the wild-eyed lad paid no heed to the admonition. He plunged, headlong, into speech, gasping, breathless.

‘It is Lord Gildoy,’ he panted. ‘He is sore wounded … at Oglethorpe’s Farm by the river. I bore him thither … and … and he sent me for you. Come away! Come away!’

He would have clutched the doctor, and haled him forth by force in bedgown and slippers as he was. But the doctor eluded that too eager hand.

‘To be sure, I’ll come,’ said he. He was distressed. Gildoy had been a very friendly, generous patron to him since his settling in these parts. And Mr. Blood was eager enough to do what he now could to discharge the debt, grieved that the occasion should have arisen, and in such a manner – for he knew quite well that the rash young nobleman had been an active agent of the Duke’s. ‘To be sure, I’ll come. But first give me leave to get some clothes and other things that I may need.’

‘There’s no time to lose.’

‘Be easy now. I’ll lose none. I tell ye again, ye’ll go quickest by going leisurely. Come in … take a chair. …’ He threw open the door of a parlour.

Young Pitt waved aside the invitation.

‘I’ll wait here. Make haste, in God’s name.’

Mr. Blood went off to dress and to fetch a case of instruments.

Questions concerning the precise nature of Lord Gildoy’s hurt could wait until they were on their way. Whilst he pulled on his boots he gave Mrs. Barlow instructions for the day, which included the matter of a dinner he was not destined to eat.

When at last he went forth again, Mrs. Barlow clucking after him like a disgruntled fowl, he found young Pitt smothered in a crowd of scared, half-dressed townsfolk – mostly women – who had come hastening for news of how the battle had sped. The news he gave them was to be read in the lamentations with which they disturbed the morning air.

At sight of the doctor, dressed and booted, the case of instruments tucked under his arm, the messenger disengaged himself from those who pressed about, shook off his weariness and the two tearful aunts that clung most closely, and seizing the bridle of his horse, he climbed to the saddle.

‘Come along, sir,’ he cried. ‘Mount behind me.’

Mr. Blood, without wasting words, did as he was bidden. Pitt touched the horse with his spur. The little crowd gave way and thus upon the crupper of that doubly-laden horse, clinging to the belt of his companion, Peter Blood set out upon his Odyssey. For this Pitt, in whom he beheld no more than the messenger of a wounded rebel gentleman, was indeed the very messenger of Fate.

CHAPTER II

KIRKE'S DRAGOONS

OGLETHORPE'S FARM STOOD a mile or so to the south of Bridgewater on the right bank of the river. It was a straggling Tudor building showing grey above the ivy that clothed its lower parts. Approaching it now, through the fragrant orchards amid which it seemed to drowse in Arcadian peace beside the waters of the Parrett, sparkling in the morning sunlight, Mr. Blood might have had a difficulty in believing it part of a world tormented by strife and bloodshed.

On the bridge, as they had been riding out of Bridgewater, they had met a vanguard of fugitives from the field of battle, weary, broken men, many of them wounded, all of them terror-stricken, staggering in speedless haste with the last remnants of their strength into the shelter which it was their vain illusion the town would afford them. Eyes glazed with lassitude and fear looked up piteously out of haggard faces at Mr. Blood and his companion as they rode forth, hoarse voices cried a warning that merciless pursuit was not far behind. Undeterred, however, young Pitt rode amain along the dusty road by which these poor fugitives from that swift rout on Sedgemoor came flocking in ever increasing numbers. Presently he swung aside, and quitting the road took to a pathway that crossed the dewy meadowlands. Even here they met odd groups of these human derelicts, who were scattering in all directions, looking fearfully behind them as they came through the long grass, expecting at every moment to see the red coats of the dragoons.

But as Pitt's direction was a southward one, bringing them ever nearer to Feversham's headquarters, they were presently clear of that human flotsam and jetsam of the battle, and riding through the peaceful orchards heavy with the ripening fruit that was soon to make its annual yield of cider.

At last they alighted on the kidney stones of the courtyard, and Baynes, the master of the homestead, grave of countenance and flustered of manner, gave them welcome.

In the spacious, stone-flagged hall, the doctor found Lord Gildoy – a very tall and dark young gentleman, prominent of chin and nose – stretched on a cane day-bed under one of the tall mullioned windows, in the care of Mrs. Baynes and her comely daughter. His cheeks were leaden-hued, his eyes closed, and from his blue lips came with each laboured breath a faint moaning noise.

Mr. Blood stood for a moment silently considering his patient. He deplored that a youth with such bright hopes in life as Lord Gildoy's should have risked all, perhaps existence itself, to forward the ambition of a worthless adventurer. Because he had liked and honoured this brave lad he paid his case the tribute of a sigh. Then he knelt to his task, ripped away doublet and underwear to lay bare his lordship's mangled side, and called for water and linen and what else he needed for his work.

He was still intent upon it a half-hour later when the dragoons invaded the homestead. The clatter of hooves and hoarse shouts that heralded their approach disturbed him not at all. For one thing, he was not easily disturbed; for another, his task absorbed him. But his lordship, who had now recovered consciousness, showed considerable alarm, and the battle-stained Jeremy Pitt sped to cover in a clothes' press. Baynes was uneasy, and his wife and daughter trembled. Mr. Blood reassured them.

'Why, what's to fear?' he said. 'It's a Christian country, this; and Christian men do not make war upon the wounded, nor upon those who harbour them.' He still had, you see, illusions about Christians. He held a glass of cordial, prepared under his directions, to his lordship's lips. 'Give your mind peace, my lord. The worst is done.'

And then they came rattling and clanking into the stone-flagged hall – a round dozen jack-booted, lobster-coated troopers of the Tangier Regiment, led by a sturdy black-browed fellow with a deal of gold lace about the breast of his coat.

Baynes stood his ground, his attitude half-defiant, whilst his wife and daughter shrank away in renewed fear. Mr. Blood, at the head of the day-bed, looked over his shoulder to take stock of the invaders.

The officer barked an order, which brought his men to an attentive halt, then swaggered forward, his gloved hand bearing down the pummel of his sword, his spurs jingling musically as he moved. He announced his authority to the yeoman.

'I am Captain Hobart of Colonel Kirke's dragoons. What rebels do you harbour?'

The yeoman took alarm at that ferocious truculence. It expressed itself in his trembling voice.

'I … I am no harbourer of rebels, sir. This wounded gentleman …'

'I can see for myself.' The captain stamped forward to the day-bed, and scowled down upon the grey-faced sufferer.

'No need to ask how he came in this state and by his wounds. A damned rebel, and that's enough for me.' He flung a command at his dragoons. 'Out with him, my lads.'

Mr. Blood got between the day-bed and the troopers.

‘In the name of humanity, sir!’ said he, on a note of anger. ‘This is England, not Tangiers. The gentleman is in sore case. He may not be moved without peril to his life.’

Captain Hobart was amused.

‘Oh, I am to be tender of the lives of these rebels! Odds blood! Do you think it’s to benefit his health we’re taking him? There’s gallows being planted along the road from Weston to Bridgewater, and he’ll serve for one of them as well as another. Colonel Kirke’ll learn these nonconforming oafs something they’ll not forget in generations.’

‘You’re hanging men without trial? Faith then, it’s mistaken I am. We’re in Tangiers after all, it seems, where your regiment belongs.’

The captain considered him with a kindling eye. He looked him over from the soles of his riding boots to the crown of his periwig. He noted the spare active frame, the arrogant poise of the head, the air of authority that invested Mr. Blood, and soldier recognised soldier. The captain’s eyes narrowed. Recognition went further.

‘Who the hell may you be?’ he exploded.

‘My name is Blood, sir – Peter Blood, at your service.’

‘Ay – ay! Codso! That’s the name. You were in French service once, were you not?’

If Mr. Blood was surprised he did not betray it.

‘I was.’

‘Then I remember you – five years ago, or more, you were in Tangiers.’

‘That is so. I knew your colonel.’

‘Faith, you may be renewing the acquaintance.’ The captain laughed unpleasantly. ‘What brings you here, sir?’

‘This wounded gentleman. I was fetched to attend him. I am a medicus.’

‘A doctor – you?’ Scorn of that lie – as he conceived it – rang in the heavy hectoring voice.

‘Medicinæ baccalaureus,’ said Mr. Blood.

‘Don’t fling your French at me, man,’ snapped Hobart. ‘Speak English!’

Mr. Blood’s smile annoyed him.

‘I am a physician practising my calling in the town of Bridgewater.’

The captain sneered. ‘Which you reached by way of Lyme Regis in the following of your bastard Duke.’

It was Mr. Blood’s turn to sneer. ‘If your wit were as big as your voice, my dear, it’s the great man you’d be by this.’

For a moment the dragoon was speechless. The colour deepened in his face.

‘You may find me great enough to hang you.’

‘Faith, yes. Ye’ve the look and the manners of a hangman. But if you practise your trade on my patient here, you may be putting a rope round your own neck. He’s not the kind you may string up and no questions asked. He has the right to trial, and the right to trial by his peers.’

‘By his peers?’

The captain was taken aback by these three words, which Mr. Blood had stressed.

‘Sure now, any but a fool or a savage would have asked his name before ordering him to the gallows. The gentleman is my Lord Gildoy.’

And then his lordship spoke for himself in a weak voice.

‘I make no concealment of my association with the Duke of Monmouth. I’ll take the consequences. But if you please, I’ll take them after trial – by my peers, as the doctor has said.’

The feeble voice ceased, and was followed by a moment’s silence. As is common in many blustering men, there was a deal of timidity deep down in Hobart. The announcement of his lordship’s rank had touched those depths. A servile upstart, he stood in awe of titles. And he stood in awe of his colonel. Percy Kirke was not lenient with blunderers.

By a gesture he checked his men. He must consider. Mr. Blood, observing his pause, added further matter for his consideration.

'Ye'll be remembering, Captain, that Lord Gildoy will have friends and relatives on the Tory side, who'll have something to say to Colonel Kirke if his lordship should be handled like a common felon. You'll go warily, captain, or, as I've said, it's a halter for your neck ye'll be weaving this morning.'

Captain Hobart swept the warning aside with a bluster of contempt, but he acted upon it none the less. 'Take up the day-bed,' said he, 'and convey him on that to Bridgewater. Lodge him in the gaol until I take order about him.'

'He may not survive the journey,' Blood remonstrated. 'He's in no case to be moved.'

'So much the worse for him. My affair is to round up rebels.' He confirmed his order by a gesture. Two of his men took up the day-bed, and swung to depart with it. Gildoy made a feeble effort to put forth a hand towards Mr. Blood. 'Sir,' he said, 'you leave me in your debt. If I live I shall study how to discharge it.'

Mr. Blood bowed for answer, then to the men. 'Bear him steadily,' he commanded. 'His life depends on it.'

As his lordship was carried out, the captain became brisk. He turned upon the yeoman.

'What other cursed rebels do you harbour?'

'None other, sir. His lordship—'

'We've dealt with his lordship for the present. We'll deal with you in a moment when we've searched your house. And by God, if you've lied to me …' He broke off, snarling to give an order. Four of his dragoons went out. In a moment they were heard moving noisily in the adjacent room. Meanwhile, the captain was questing about the hall, sounding the wainscoting with the butt of a pistol.

Mr. Blood saw no profit to himself in lingering.

'By your leave, it's a very good-day I'll be wishing you,' said he.

'By my leave you'll remain awhile,' the captain ordered him.

Mr. Blood shrugged, and sat down. 'You're tiresome,' he said. 'I wonder your colonel hasn't discovered it yet.'

But the captain did not heed him. He was stooping to pick up a soiled and dusty hat in which there was pinned a little bunch of oak leaves. It had been lying near the clothes' press in which the unfortunate Pitt had taken refuge. The captain smiled malevolently. His eyes raked the room, resting first sardonically on the yeoman, then on the two women in the background and finally on Mr. Blood, who sat with one leg thrown over the other in an attitude of indifference that was far from reflecting his mind.

Then the captain stepped to the press, and pulled open one of the wings of its massive oaken door. He took the huddled inmate by the collar of his doublet, and lugged him out into the open.

'And who the devil's this?' quoth he. 'Another nobleman?'

Mr. Blood had a vision of those gallows of which Captain Hobart had spoken, and of this unfortunate young shipmaster going to adorn one of them, strung up without trial, in the place of the other victim of whom the captain had been cheated. On the spot he invented not only a title but a whole family for the young rebel.

'Faith, ye've said it, captain. This is Viscount Pitt, first cousin to Sir Thomas Vernon, who's married to that slut Moll Kirke, sister to your own colonel and sometime lady-in-waiting upon King James's queen.'

Both the captain and his prisoner gasped. But whereas thereafter young Pitt discreetly held his peace, the captain rapped out a nasty oath. He considered his prisoner again.

'He's lying, is he not?' he demanded, seizing the lad by the shoulder, and glaring into his face. 'He's rallying me, by

God!'

'If ye believe that,' said Blood, 'hang him and see what happens to you.'

The dragoon glared at the doctor and then at his prisoner. 'Pah!' He thrust the lad into the hands of his men. 'Fetch him along to Bridgewater. And make fast that fellow also.' He pointed to Baynes. 'We'll show him what it means to harbour and comfort rebels.'

There was a moment of confusion. Baynes struggled in the grip of the troopers, protesting vehemently. The terrified women screamed until silenced by a greater terror. The captain strode across to them. He took the girl by the shoulders. She was a pretty golden-headed creature with soft blue eyes that looked up entreatingly, piteously into the face of the dragoon. He leered upon her, his eyes aglow, took her chin in his hand, and set her shuddering by his brutal kiss.

'It's an earnest,' he said, smiling grimly. 'Let that quiet you, little rebel, till I've done with these rogues.'

And he swung away again, leaving her faint and trembling in the arms of her anguished mother. His men stood grinning, awaiting orders, the two prisoners now fast pinioned.

'Take them away. Let Cornet Drake have charge of them.' His smouldering eye again sought the cowering girl. 'I'll stay awhile – to search out this place. There may be other rebels hidden here.' As an afterthought, he added: 'And take this fellow with you.' He pointed to Mr. Blood. 'Bestir!'

Mr. Blood started out of his musings. He had been considering that in his case of instruments there was a lancet with which he might perform on Captain Hobart a beneficial operation. Beneficial, that is, to humanity. In any case, the dragoon was obviously plethoric and would be the better for a blood-letting. The difficulty lay in making the opportunity. He was beginning to wonder if he could lure