VINTAGE SABATINI

The Sea-Hawk

Contents

About the Book

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY BEN KANE

Sabatini’s stories abound with drama and melodrama, action and excitement and brilliant colour… No writer, not Scott, nor Dumas, nor Stevenson, has brought the past to life more vividly’ George MacDonald Fraser

Oliver Tressilian, a Cornish gentleman, is blessed with ‘youth, wealth, and good digestion.’ When he is betrayed by his half-brother he becomes a Barbary pirate and wins the title of Sakr-el-Bahr – Hawk of the Sea – scourge of the Mediterranean and the terror of Christians…

See also: *Captain Blood*

About the Author

Rafael Sabatini was born in Jesi, Italy, in 1875 to an English mother and Italian father, both renowned opera singers. At a young age, Rafael travelled frequently, and could speak several 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*. He 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 Fortunes of Captain Blood

The Snare

Captain Blood

The Chronicles of Captain Blood

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

Scaramouche

TO
FRANCIS R. PRYOR,
WHO SENT ME A-SAILING FROM FALMOUTH
TO THE COAST OF BARBARY

RAFAEL SABATINI

The Sea-Hawk

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Ben Kane

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

Introduction

For most people, the word ‘pirate’ will conjure up instant and dramatic mental images. The typical pirate is a hulking, bearded figure with gold earrings. He has a rusty cutlass and a flintlock pistol shoved into his broad leather belt, and stands on the deck of a ship crewed by a horde of savage comrades. Above them flies a black flag portraying a skull and crossbones: the Jolly Roger. Woe betide anyone who comes within their grasp. Naturally enough, the alluring imagery I have described has some origins in films or TV programmes. And where did those media get their ideas from? For the most part, it was from nineteenth and twentieth century novels such as *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, and *The Sea-Hawk* and *Captain Blood* by Rafael Sabatini. The huge success of both of Sabatini’s pirate stories meant that they were rapidly made into films. As I mentioned, they have since had a huge influence on the modern cultural perception of pirates, culminating most recently with the hugely successful *Pirates of the Caribbean* films.

In my mind, however, the allure of pirates has its roots in far more than their portrayal by various forms of media. The thought of such men taps into a deep, fearful vein from our past. Throughout history, there have been innumerable groups of pirates, on just about every large body of water in the world. Generation after generation of our ancestors knew exactly what it was like to be the victim of a pirate raid. Indeed they still exist today in some regions, most notably in the Indian Ocean off Somalia and the waters off

parts of South East Asia. These modern corsairs serve to remind us that the fearsome historical figures depicted in popular culture actually have their basis in reality.

Since ancient times, pirates have terrorised sailors and land dwellers alike. The Greeks and Romans suffered attacks for long periods on their shipping and larger ports; in the first century BC, Julius Caesar himself was captured and held to ransom by pirates. Several hundred years later, Gothic fleets plundered areas of Cyprus and Crete. In the fifth century AD, Irish pirates were responsible for carrying Saint Patrick into captivity. By the late eighth century, the Vikings had begun to cast their bloody shadow over much of Europe, raiding the coastline of western Europe right into the Mediterranean basin. Their period of influence over the island of Britain lasted for nearly three hundred years. It isn't surprising, therefore, that the Vikings are still vividly remembered today.

Perhaps the most stereotypical pirates, or buccaneers, were those who sailed the Caribbean from the mid 1500s to the early 1700s. Preying on Spanish and Portuguese shipping, as well as towns and cities, they were mostly English, Dutch or French in nationality. They based themselves on islands such as the Bahamas, and Tortuga, now part of modern day Haiti, and which featured in both Sabatini's *Captain Blood* and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films. Famous captains at this time included Henry Teach, known as 'Blackbeard', Henry Morgan and John Rackham, known as 'Calico Jack', the man who designed the Jolly Roger.

The Barbary pirates are perhaps not as well known as their cousins in the Caribbean, but their place in history is no less important. From the time of the Crusades right up until the nineteenth century, they terrorised large parts of the Mediterranean. Based in ports along the North African coastline, the Barbary pirates were a byword for depravity and wickedness, bearing countless thousands of Christian

captives into a life of slavery under Muslim masters. In the early 1600s, they raided as far north as Ireland, and even Iceland on two occasions.

I have actually been to the location in Iceland attacked by the Barbary pirates in 1627. Unfortunately, I hadn't read *The Sea-Hawk* at that time. Nonetheless, it was an unnerving feeling to stand on the Westman islands, that most beautiful and peaceful of places, imagining ships full of dark-skinned, savage corsairs arriving from nowhere to carry off the terrified inhabitants. Given such horrifying, true stories, it was a natural step for Rafael Sabatini to use Barbary pirates as a major plot feature in *The Sea-Hawk*. This, alongside *Scaramouche* and *Captain Blood*, remains one of his most famous and successful novels, and for good reason.

Before we turn to the book, Sabatini himself bears the need for some attention. This is not just because he wrote *The Sea-Hawk*, but because his life story is quite unusual. He was born in Italy in 1875, to an English mother and an Italian father. Remarkably enough, both were opera singers, travelling the world to ply their trade. As a young child, Sabatini was left in the care of relations in England, but when his parents returned to Europe, he lived and attended schools variously in Portugal, Italy and Switzerland. During the course of this cosmopolitan childhood, he became fluent in not just English and Italian, but Portuguese, French and German!

A voracious reader from a tender age, Sabatini was particularly keen on Shakespeare, and the stories of Alexandre Dumas (author of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*) and Jules Verne (author of *Around the World in Eighty Days, A Journey to the Centre of the Earth* and *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*). He finished his education in 1892, at the age of seventeen. Travelling to Liverpool shortly thereafter, he began working in business as an interpreter. Sabatini had started to write while he

was still in school, and this was a habit that continued into his working life. In Liverpool, he began to pen romantic short stories. By the turn of the century, the determined Sabatini was selling his fiction to large, national magazines. It would be another five years, however, before he could quit his day job to become a fulltime writer.

In the same year, 1905, Sabatini married Ruth Goad Dixon, the daughter of a wealthy paper merchant. Four years later, the couple had a son, Rafael-Angelo, who was to become known to one and all by his nickname, Binkie. During the next decade, Sabatini wrote not just short stories, but a novel a year; among the books he produced in this period was *The Sea-Hawk*. Despite his remarkable output, wide-scale popularity still eluded him. During World War One, Sabatini became a British citizen to avoid conscription into the Italian army. He was employed as an interpreter by the Intelligence service but continued to write novels at the same time.

Scaramouche, a romance set at the time of the French Revolution, was published in 1921. It turned out to be the novel that took Sabatini's career to new heights. After initial rejections by a number of publishers, it was released in Britain and then the United States, and became a runaway international success. Sabatini's popularity knew no limits when *Captain Blood*, a pirate novel, was brought out the following year. It achieved even greater results than *Scaramouche*. His previously published works were soon reprinted, the most popular of which was *The Sea-Hawk*. Before long, six of his novels had been turned into films; others were made into plays.

Sabatini's new-found wealth was soon to be tarnished by tragedy, however. In 1927, Binkie was killed in a car accident. Ruth was also in the vehicle, but was unharmed. Sabatini was one of the first to arrive on the scene, and one can only imagine the increased suffering this laid upon him in the most tragic of circumstances. His marriage to Ruth

ended four years later. Things went from bad to worse in that year as sales of Sabatini's books fell dramatically because of the start of the Great Depression in the United States. Despite this, Sabatini continued to write. It was apparently of great help to him during this hard time, providing an escape from the melancholy that must have blanketed his every moment.

By 1935, Sabatini was living near Hay-on-Wye, on the English–Welsh border. He was remarried, to his former sister-in-law, Christine Dixon. Together they built a life based around Sabatini's two passions other than writing: those of fishing and skiing. Summers were spent in England, and winters in Switzerland. Their happiness was not to last, however. In 1939, Christine's son Lancelot, who had just graduated as a pilot, decided to fly over Sabatini's house in celebration. Before their horrified eyes, he crashed and was killed. One such tragedy in a lifetime is terrible enough, but for it to strike twice must be utterly heartbreaking.

In my opinion, it's not surprising that Sabatini's output fell after the catastrophe of his stepson's death. Through the 1940s, his health also began to suffer. He died in February 1950, in Switzerland. The words carved on his tombstone are from the first line of *Scaramouche*: 'He was born with a gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad.' Fine words that ring true.

The Sea-Hawk was first published more than ninety-five years ago. Naturally enough, the vast majority of books published at that time have long since been forgotten. *The Sea-Hawk* – twice filmed and with total worldwide sales of more than half a million copies – is one of a select few to stand the test of time. In my mind, the reasons for this are clear. For a start, it's about pirates! It is also a powerful and gripping story, which is marvellously well told. Critically for an historical tale, the rich imagery – in this

case of the seventeenth century – is authentically drawn. Sabatini's mastery of storytelling transports readers with ease from the life of an English country noble to the miserable existence of a galley slave; from the vibrant and colourful, teeming streets of Algiers to the filth and degradation of its slave market. His bloody sea battles and romantic scenes are described with equal skill. Themes of love, betrayal, outstanding courage and ultimately, redemption, run though *The Sea-Hawk*, and appeal to us all.

Its central character – the bold Sir Oliver Tressilian – is a courageous, tough hero with a tender streak. He is devoted to Rosamund Godolphin, his lover, and displays both loyalty and protectiveness towards Lionel, his weak-willed half brother. He endures with great fortitude the ordeals life throws at him, managing eventually to become the most feared pirate in the Mediterranean, *Sakr-El-Bahr*, the Hawk of the Sea.

Despite his elevated position, *Sakr-El-Bahr* is always surrounded by enemies. For the most part, they are stereotypical 'baddies' who enrich the story and whom we absolutely love to hate. There is Asad-ed-Din, the calculating Basha of Algiers, Fenzileh, his scheming wife, and their evil son Marzak. Most importantly and poignantly of all, there is Lionel, Oliver's yellow-livered half brother, who haunts him from the novel's beginning to its end. To reveal how Lionel makes his way from England to Algiers would be to give away far too much. I shall let you, noble reader, discover all for yourself in the pages that follow. So without further ado, I offer you *The Sea-Hawk*, by Rafael Sabatini. May you enjoy it as much as I did!

Ben Kane, 2011

Author’s Note

Lord Henry Goade, who had, as we shall see, some personal acquaintance with Sir Oliver Tressilian, tells us quite bluntly that he was ill favoured. But then his lordship is addicted to harsh judgments and his perceptions are not always normal. He says, for instance, of Anne of Cleves that she was the ‘ugliest woman that ever I saw’. As far as we can glean from his own voluminous writings it would seem to be extremely doubtful whether he ever saw Anne of Cleves at all, and we suspect him here of being no more than a slavish echo of the common voice, which attributed Cromwell’s downfall to the ugliness of this bride he procured for his Bluebeard master. To the common voice I prefer the document from the brush of Holbein, which permits us to form our own opinions and shows us a lady who is certainly very far from deserving his lordship’s harsh stricture.

Similarly, I like to believe that Lord Henry was wrong in his pronouncement upon Sir Oliver, and I am encouraged in this belief by the pen-portrait which he himself appends to it. ‘He was,’ he says, ‘a tall, powerful fellow of a good shape, if we except that his arms were too long and that his feet and hands were of an uncomely bigness. In face he was swarthy with black hair and a black forked beard; his nose was big and very high in the bridge, and his eyes sunk deep under the beetling eyebrows were very pale-coloured and very cruel and sinister. He had – and this I have ever remarked to be the sign of great virility in a man – a big, deep, rough voice, better suited to, and no doubt oftener

employed in, quarter-deck oaths and foulnesses than the worship of his Maker.'

Thus my Lord Henry Goade, and you observe how he permits his lingering disapproval of the man to intrude upon his description of him. The truth is that – as there is ample testimony in his prolific writings – his lordship was something of a misanthropist. It was, in fact, his misanthropy which drove him, as it has driven many another, to authorship. He takes up the pen, not so much that he may carry out his professed object of writing a chronicle of his own time, but to the end that he may vent the bitterness engendered in him by his fall from favour. As a consequence he has little that is good to say of anyone, and rarely mentions one of his contemporaries but to tap the sources of a picturesque invective.

After all, it is possible to make excuses for him. He was at once a man of thought and a man of action – a combination as rare as it is usually deplorable. The man of action in him might have gone far had he not been ruined at the outset by the man of thought. A magnificent seaman, he might have become Lord High Admiral of England but for a certain proneness to intrigue. Fortunately for him – since otherwise he could hardly have kept his head where nature had placed it – he came betimes under a cloud of suspicion. His career suffered a check; but it was necessary to afford him some compensation since, after all, the suspicions could not be substantiated. Consequently he was removed from his command and appointed by the Queen's Grace her Lieutenant of Cornwall, a position in which it was judged that he could do little mischief.

There, soured by this blighting of his ambitions, and living a life of comparative seclusion, he turned, as so many other men similarly placed have turned, to seek consolation in his pen. He wrote his singularly crabbed, narrow and superficial *History of Lord Henry Goade: his own Times* – which is a miracle of injuvenations, distortions,

misrepresentations and eccentric spelling. In the eighteen enormous folio volumes which he filled with his minute and gothic characters he gives his own version of the story of what he terms his downfall, and having, notwithstanding his prolixity, exhausted this subject in the first five of the eighteen tomes, he proceeds to deal with so much of the history of his own day as came immediately under his notice in his Cornish retirement.

For the purposes of English history his chronicles are entirely negligible, which is the reason why they have been allowed to remain unpublished and in oblivion. But to the student who attempts to follow the history of that extraordinary man Sir Oliver Tressilian, they are entirely invaluable. And, since I have made this history my present task, it is fitting that I should here at the outset acknowledge my extreme indebtedness to those chronicles. Without them, indeed, it were impossible to reconstruct the life of that Cornish gentleman who became a renegade and a Barbary Corsair and might have become Basha of Algiers – or Argire, as his lordship terms it – but for certain matters which are to be set forth.

Lord Henry wrote with knowledge and authority, and the tale he has to tell is very complete and full of precious detail. He was, himself, an eyewitness of much that happened; he pursued a personal acquaintance with many of those who were connected with Sir Oliver’s affairs that he might amplify his chronicles, and he considered no scrap of gossip that was to be gleaned along the countryside too trivial to be recorded. I suspect him also of having received no little assistance from Jasper Leigh in the matter of those events that happened out of England, which seem to me to constitute by far the most interesting portion of his narrative.

R. S.

Part One

Sir Oliver Tressilian

1

The Huckster

Sir Oliver Tressilian sat at his ease in the lofty dining-room of the handsome house of Penarrow, which he owed to the enterprise of his father of lamented and lamentable memory and to the skill and invention of an Italian engineer named Bagnolo who had come to England half a century ago as one of the assistants of the famous Torrigiani.

This house of such startlingly singular and Italianate grace for so remote a corner of Cornwall deserves, together with the story of its construction, a word in passing.

The Italian Bagnolo who combined with his salient artistic talents a quarrelsome, volcanic humour had the mischance to kill a man in a brawl in a Southwark tavern. As a result he fled the town, nor paused in his headlong flight from the consequences of that murderous deed until he had all but reached the very ends of England. Under what circumstances he became acquainted with Tressilian the elder I do not know. But certain it is that the meeting was a very timely one for both of them. To the fugitive, Ralph Tressilian – who appears to have been inveterately partial to the company of rascals of all denominations – afforded shelter; and Bagnolo repaid the service by offering to rebuild the decaying half-timbered house of Penarrow.

Having taken the task in hand he went about it with all the enthusiasm of your true artist, and achieved for his protector a residence that was a marvel of grace in that

crude age and outlandish district. There arose under the supervision of the gifted engineer, worthy associate of Messer Torrigiani, a noble two-storied mansion of mellow red brick, flooded with light and sunshine by the enormously tall mullioned windows that rose almost from base to summit of each pilastered façade. The main doorway was set in a projecting wing and was overhung by a massive balcony, the whole surmounted by a pillared pediment of extraordinary grace, now partly clad in a green mantle of creepers. Above the burnt red tiles of the roof soared massive twisted chimneys in lofty majesty.

But the glory of Penarrow – that is, of the new Penarrow begotten of the fertile brain of Bagnolo – was the garden fashioned out of the tangled wilderness about the old house that had crowned the heights above Penarrow Point. To the labours of Bagnolo, Time and Nature had added their own. Bagnolo had cut those handsome esplanades, had built those noble balustrades bordering the three terraces with their fine connecting flights of steps; himself he had planned the fountain, and with his own hands had carved the granite faun presiding over it and the dozen other statues of nymphs and sylvan gods in a marble that gleamed in white brilliance amid the dusky green. But Time and Nature had smoothed the lawns to a velvet surface, had thickened the handsome boxwood hedges, and thrust up those black spearlike poplars that completed the very Italianate appearance of that Cornish demesne.

Sir Oliver took his ease in his dining-room considering all this as it was displayed before him in the mellowing September sunshine, and found it all very good to see, and life very good to live. Now no man has ever been known so to find life without some immediate cause, other than that of his environment, for his optimism. Sir Oliver had several causes. The first of these – although it was one which he may have been far from suspecting – was his equipment of youth, wealth, and good digestion; the second was that he

had achieved honour and renown both upon the Spanish Main and in the late harrying of the Invincible Armada – or, more aptly perhaps might it be said, in the harrying of the late Invincible Armada – and that he had received in that twenty-fifth year of his life the honour of knighthood from the Virgin Queen; the third and last contributor to his pleasant mood – and I have reserved it for the end as I account this to be the proper place for the most important factor – was Dan Cupid who for once seemed compounded entirely of benignity and who had so contrived matters that Sir Oliver's wooing of Mistress Rosamund Godolphin ran an entirely smooth and happy course.

So, then, Sir Oliver sat at his ease in his tall, carved chair, his doublet untrussed, his long legs stretched before him, a pensive smile about the firm lips that as yet were darkened by no more than a small black line of moustachios. (Lord Henry's portrait of him was drawn at a much later period.) It was noon, and our gentleman had just dined, as the platters, the broken meats and the half-empty flagon on the board beside him testified. He pulled thoughtfully at a long pipe – for he had acquired this newly imported habit of tobacco-drinking – and dreamed of his mistress, and was properly and gallantly grateful that fortune had used him so handsomely as to enable him to toss a title and some measure of renown into his Rosamund's lap.

By nature Sir Oliver was a shrewd fellow ('cunning as twenty devils', is my Lord Henry's phrase) and he was also a man of some not inconsiderable learning. Yet neither his natural wit nor his acquired endowments appear to have taught him that of all the gods that rule the destinies of mankind there is none more ironic and malicious than that same Dan Cupid in whose honour, as it were, he was now burning the incense of that pipe of his. The ancients knew that innocent-seeming boy for a cruel, impish knave, and they mistrusted him. Sir Oliver either did not know or did

not heed that sound piece of ancient wisdom. It was to be borne in upon him by grim experience, and even as his light pensive eyes smiled upon the sunshine that flooded the terrace beyond the long mullioned window, a shadow fell athwart it which he little dreamed to be symbolic of the shadow that was even falling across the sunshine of his life.

After that shadow came the substance – tall and gay of raiment under a broad black Spanish hat decked with blood-red plumes. Swinging a long beribboned cane the figure passed the windows, stalking deliberately as Fate.

The smile perished on Sir Oliver's lips. His swarthy face grew thoughtful, his black brows contracted until no more than a single deep furrow stood between them. Then slowly the smile came forth again, but no longer that erstwhile gentle, pensive smile. It was transformed into a smile of resolve and determination, a smile that tightened his lips even as his brows relaxed, and invested his brooding eyes with a gleam that was mocking, crafty, and almost wicked.

Came Nicholas his servant to announce Master Peter Godolphin, and close upon the lackey's heels came Master Godolphin himself, leaning upon his beribboned cane and carrying his broad Spanish hat. He was a tall, slender gentleman with a shaven, handsome countenance, stamped with an air of haughtiness; like Sir Oliver, he had a high-bridged, intrepid nose, and in age he was the younger by some two or three years. He wore his auburn hair rather longer than was the mode just then, but in his apparel there was no more foppishness than is tolerable in a gentleman of his years.

Sir Oliver rose and bowed from his great height in welcome. But a wave of tobacco-smoke took his graceful visitor in the throat and set him coughing and grimacing.

'I see,' he choked, 'that ye have acquired that filthy habit.'

'I have known filthier,' said Sir Oliver composedly.

‘I nothing doubt it,’ rejoined Master Godolphin, thus early giving indications of his humour and the object of his visit.

Sir Oliver checked an answer that must have helped his visitor to his ends, which was no part of the knight’s intent.

‘Therefore,’ said he ironically, ‘I hope you will be patient with my shortcomings. Nick, a chair for Master Godolphin and another cup! I bid you welcome to Penarrow.’

A sneer flickered over the young man’s white face. ‘You pay me a compliment, sir, which I fear me ’tis not mine to return to you.’

‘Time enough for that when I come to seek it,’ said Sir Oliver, with easy, if assumed, good humour.

‘When you come to seek it?’

‘The hospitality of your house,’ Sir Oliver explained.

‘It is on that very matter I am come to talk with you.’

‘Will you sit?’ Sir Oliver invited him, and spread a hand towards the chair which Nicholas had set. In the same gesture he waved the servant away.

Master Godolphin ignored the invitation, ‘You were,’ he said, ‘at Godolphin Court but yesterday, I hear.’ He paused and as Sir Oliver offered no denial, he added stiffly: ‘I am come, sir, to inform you that the honour of your visits is one we shall be happy to forgo.’

In the effort he made to preserve his self-control before so direct an affront Sir Oliver paled a little under his tan. ‘You will understand, Peter,’ he replied slowly, ‘that you have said too much unless you add something more.’ He paused, considering his visitor a moment. ‘I do not know whether Rosamund has told you that yesterday she did me the honour to consent to become my wife—’

‘She is a child that does not know her own mind,’ broke in the other.

‘Do you know of any good reason why she should come to change it?’ asked Sir Oliver, with a slight air of challenge.

Master Godolphin sat down, crossed his legs and placed his hat on his knee. ‘I know a dozen,’ he answered. ‘But I need not urge them. Sufficient should it be to remind you that Rosamund is but seventeen, and that she is under my guardianship and that of Sir John Killigrew. Neither Sir John nor I can sanction this betrothal.’

‘Good lack!’ broke out Sir Oliver. ‘Who asks your sanction or Sir John’s? By God’s grace your sister will grow to be a woman soon and mistress of herself. I am in no desperate haste to get me wed, and by nature – as you may be observing – I am a wondrous patient man. I’ll even wait.’ And he pulled at his pipe.

‘Waiting cannot avail you in this, Sir Oliver. ’Tis best you should understand. We are resolved, Sir John and I.’

‘Are you so? God’s light! Send Sir John to me to tell me of his resolves and I’ll tell him something of mine. Tell him from me, Master Godolphin, that if he will trouble to come as far as Penarrow I’ll do by him what the hangman should have done long since. I’ll crop his pimpish ears for him, by this hand!’

‘Meanwhile,’ said Master Godolphin whettingly, ‘will you not essay your rover’s prowess upon me?’

‘You?’ quoth Sir Oliver, and looked him over with good-humoured contempt. ‘I’m no butcher of fledglings, my lad. Besides, you are your sister’s brother, and ’tis no aim of mine to increase the obstacles already in my path.’ Then his tone changed. He leaned across the table. ‘Come, now, Peter. What is at the root of all this matter? Can we not compose such differences as you conceive exist? Out with them! ’Tis no matter for Sir John. He’s a curmudgeon who signifies not a finger’s snap. But you, ’tis different. You are her brother. Out with your plaints, then! Let us be frank and friendly.’

‘Friendly?’ The other sneered again. ‘Our fathers set us an example in that.’

‘Does it matter what our fathers did. More shame to them if, being neighbours, they could not be friends. Shall we follow so deplorable an example?’

‘You’ll not impute that the fault lay with *my* father!’ cried the other, with a show of ready anger.

‘I impute nothing, lad. I cry shame upon them both.’

‘’Swounds!’ swore Master Peter. ‘Do you malign the dead?’

‘If I do, I malign them both. But I do not. I no more than condemn a fault that both must acknowledge could they return to life.’

‘Then, sir, confine your condemnings to your own father with whom no man of honour could have lived at peace—’

‘Softly, softly, good sir—’

‘There’s no call to go softly. Ralph Tressilian was a dishonour, a scandal to the countryside. Not a hamlet between here and Truro, or between here and Helston, but swarms with big Tressilian noses like your own, in memory of your debauched parent.’

Sir Oliver’s eyes grew, narrower; he smiled. ‘I wonder how you came by your own nose?’ he wondered.

Master Godolphin got to his feet in a passion, and his chair crashed over behind him. ‘Sir,’ he blazed, ‘you insult my mother’s memory!’

Sir Oliver laughed. ‘I make a little free with it, perhaps, in return for your pleasantries on the score of my father.’

Master Godolphin pondered him in speechless anger, then swayed by his passion he leaned across the board, raised his long cane and struck Sir Oliver on the shoulder.

That done, he strode off magnificently towards the door. Half-way thither he paused.

‘I shall expect your friends and the length of your sword,’ said he.

Sir Oliver laughed again. ‘I don’t think I shall trouble to send them,’ said he.

Master Godolphin wheeled, fully to face him again. ‘How? You will take a blow?’

Sir Oliver shrugged. ‘None saw it given,’ said he.

‘But I shall publish it abroad that I have caned you.’

‘You’ll publish yourself a liar if you do; for none will believe you.’ Then he changed his tone yet again. ‘Come, Peter, we are behaving unworthily. As for the blow, I confess that I deserved it. A man’s mother is more sacred than his father. So we may cry quits on that score. Can we not cry quits on all else? What can it profit us to perpetuate a foolish quarrel that sprang up between our fathers?’

‘There is more than that between us,’ answered Master Godolphin. ‘I’ll not have my sister wed a pirate.’

‘A pirate? God’s light! I’m glad there’s none to hear you, for since her grace has knighted me for my doings upon the seas, your words go very near to treason. Surely, lad, what the Queen approves, Master Peter Godolphin may approve and even your mentor Sir John Killigrew. You’ve been listening to him. ’Twas he sent you hither.’

‘I am no man’s lackey,’ answered the other hotly, resenting the imputation – and resenting it the more because of the truth in it.

‘To call me a pirate is to say a foolish thing. Hawkins with whom I sailed has also received the accolade, and who dubs us pirates insults the Queen herself. Apart from that, which, as you see, is a very empty charge, what else have you against me? I am, I hope, as good as any other here in Cornwall; Rosamund honours me with her affection and I am rich and shall be richer still ere the wedding bells are heard.’

‘Rich with the fruit of thieving upon the seas, rich with the treasures of scuttled ships and the price of slaves captured in Africa and sold to the plantations, rich as the vampire is glutted – with the blood of dead men!’

‘Does Sir John say that?’ asked Sir Oliver, in a soft, deadly voice.

‘I say it.’

‘I heard you; but I am asking where you learnt that pretty lesson. Is Sir John your preceptor? He is, he is. No need to tell me. I’ll deal with him. Meanwhile let me disclose to you the pure and disinterested source of Sir John’s rancour. You shall see what an upright and honest gentleman is Sir John, who was your father’s friend and has been your guardian.’

‘I’ll not listen to what you say of him.’

‘Nay, but you shall, in return for having made me listen to what he says of me. Sir John desires to obtain a licence to build at the mouth of the Fal. He hopes to see a town spring up above the haven there under the shadow of his own manor of Arwenack. He represents himself as nobly disinterested and all concerned for the prosperity of his country, and he neglects to mention that the land is his own and that it is his own prosperity and that of his family which he is concerned to foster. We met in London by a fortunate chance whilst Sir John was about this business at the Court. Now it happens that I, too, have interests in Truro and Penryn; but, unlike Sir John, I am honest in the matter, and proclaim it. If any growth should take place about Smithick it follows from its more advantageous situation that Truro and Penryn must suffer, and that suits me as little as the other matter would suit Sir John. I told him so, for I can be blunt, and I told the Queen in the form of a counter-petition to Sir John’s.’ He shrugged. ‘The moment was propitious to me. I was one of the seamen who had helped to conquer the unconquerable Armada of King Philip. I was therefore not to be denied, and Sir John was sent home as empty-handed as he went to Court. D’ye marvel that he hates me? Knowing him for what he is, d’ye marvel that he dubs me pirate and worse? ’Tis natural enough to misrepresent my doings upon the sea, since it is those doings have afforded me the power to hurt his profit. He has chosen the weapons of calumny for this combat, but

those weapons are not mine, as I shall show him this very day. If you do not credit what I say, come with me and be present at the little talk I hope to have with that curmudgeon.'

'You forget,' said Master Godolphin, 'that I, too, have interests in the neighbourhood of Smithick, and that you are hurting those.'

'Soho!' crowed Sir Oliver. 'Now at last the sun of truth peeps forth from all this cloud of righteous indignation at my bad Tressilian blood and pirate's ways! You, too, are but a trafficker. Now see what a fool I am to have believed you sincere, and to have stood here in talk with you as with an honest man.' His voice swelled and his lip curled in a contempt that struck the other like a blow. 'I swear I had not wasted breath with you had I known you for so mean and pitiful a fellow.'

'These words—' began Master Godolphin, drawing himself up very stiffly.

'Are a deal less than your deserts,' cut in the other, and he raised his voice to call – 'Nick!'

'You shall answer for them,' snapped the visitor.

'I am answering now,' was the stern answer. 'To come here and prate to me of my dead father's dissoluteness and of an ancient quarrel between him and yours, to bleat of my trumped-up course of piracy and my own ways of life as a just cause why I may not wed your sister, whilst the real consideration in your mind, the real spur to your hostility is no more than the matter of some few paltry pounds a year that I hinder you from pocketing. A' God's name get you gone!'

Nick entered at that moment.

'You shall hear from me again, Sir Oliver,' said the other, white with anger. 'You shall account to me for these words.'

'I do not fight with … with hucksters,' flashed Sir Oliver.

'D'ye dare call me that?'

‘Indeed, ’tis to discredit an honourable class, I confess it. Nick, the door for Master Godolphin.’