



***G. A. HENTY***

***BY ENGLAND'S AID; OR,  
THE FREEING  
OF THE NETHERLANDS,  
1585-1604***

**G. A. Henty**

# **By England's Aid; Or, the Freeing of the Netherlands, 1585-1604**

EAN 8596547339120

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: [DigiCat@okpublishing.info](mailto:DigiCat@okpublishing.info)



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.

ILLUSTRATIONS

BY ENGLAND'S AID

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XII.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHAPTER XV.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHAPTER XIX.

CHAPTER XX.

CHAPTER XXI

CHAPTER XXII.

Chapter XXIII.

# **PREFACE.**

## [Table of Contents](#)

In my preface to *By Pike and Dyke* I promised in a future story to deal with the closing events of the War of Independence in Holland. The period over which that war extended was so long, and the incidents were so numerous and varied, that it was impossible to include the whole within the limit of a single book. The former volume brought the story of the struggle down to the death of the Prince of Orange and the capture of Antwerp; the present gives the second phase of the war, when England, who had long unofficially assisted Holland, threw herself openly into the struggle, and by her aid mainly contributed to the successful issue of the war. In the first part of the struggle the scene lay wholly among the low lands and cities of Holland and Zeeland, and the war was strictly a defensive one, waged against overpowering odds. After England threw herself into the strife it assumed far wider proportions, and the independence of the Netherlands was mainly secured by the defeat and destruction of the great Armada, by the capture of Cadiz and the fatal blow thereby struck at the mercantile prosperity of Spain, and by the defeat of the Holy League by Henry of Navarre, aided by English soldiers and English gold. For the facts connected with the doings of Sir Francis Vere and the British contingent in Holland, I have

depended much upon the excellent work by Mr. Clement Markham entitled the *Fighting Veres*. In this full justice is done to the great English general and his followers, and it is conclusively shown that some statements to the disparagement of Sir Francis Vere by Mr. Motley are founded upon a misconception of the facts. Sir Francis Vere was, in the general opinion of the time, one of the greatest commanders of the age, and more, perhaps, than any other man—with the exception of the Prince of Orange—contributed to the successful issue of the struggle of Holland to throw off the yoke of Spain.

## **G. A. HENTY.**

### **CHAP.**

**I. AN EXCURSION II. A MEETING IN CHEPE III. IN THE  
LOW COUNTRY IV. THE SIEGE OP SLUYS V. AN HEROIC  
DEFENCE VI. THE LOSS OF THE "SUSAN" VII. A POPISH  
PLOT VIII. THE SPANISH ARMADA IX. THE ROUT OF  
THE ARMADA X. THE WAR IN HOLLAND XI. IN SPAIN  
XII. RECRUITING THEIR FUNDS XIII. THE FESTA AT  
SEVILLE XIV. THE SURPRISE OF BREDA XV. A SLAVE IN  
BARBARY XVI. THE ESCAPE XVII. A SPANISH  
MERCHANT XVIII. IVRY XIX. STEENWYK XX. CADIZ XXI.  
THE BATTLE OF NIEUPOORT XXII. OLD FRIENDS XXIII.  
THE SIEGE OF OSTEND**

# ILLUSTRATIONS

[Table of Contents](#)

Geoffrey And Lionel Save Francis Vere's Life  
The Four Pages Carry Down The Wounded Soldier  
The Next Few Minutes It Was A Wild Struggle For Life  
Geoffrey Carried Overboard By The Falling Mast  
Geoffrey Gives Inez Her Lover's Note  
Geoffrey Falls Into The Hands Of The Corsairs  
Crossing The Bridge Of Boats Over The Haven  
Vere's Horse Shot Under Him At The Fight Before Ostend

\* \* \* \* \*

Plan of Sluys and the Castle, to illustrate the Siege of 1587

Plan of Breda and its Defences, illustrating its surprise and capture in 1590

Map of Cadiz and Harbour at the time of its capture in 1596, showing the position of the English and Spanish Ships

Plan of Ostend and its Defences, showing the lines of the attacking forces during the siege of 1601-4

## BY ENGLAND'S AID

[Table of Contents](#)

### CHAPTER I

## AN EXCURSION

"And we beseech Thee, O Lord, to give help and succour to Thy servants the people of Holland, and to deliver them from the cruelties and persecutions of their wicked oppressors; and grant Thy blessing, we pray Thee, upon the arms of our soldiers now embarking to aid them in their extremity." These were the words with which the Rev. John Vickars, rector of Hedingham, concluded the family prayers on the morning of 6th December, 1585.

For twenty years the first portion of this prayer had been repeated daily by him, as it had been in tens of thousands of English households; for since the people of the Netherlands first rose against the Spanish yoke the hearts of the Protestants of England had beat warmly in their cause, and they had by turns been moved to admiration at the indomitable courage with which the Dutch struggled for independence against the might of the greatest power in Europe, and to horror and indignation at the pitiless cruelty and wholesale massacres by which the Spaniards had striven to stamp out resistance.

From the first the people of England would gladly have joined in the fray, and made common cause with their co-religionists; but the queen and her counsellors had been restrained by weighty considerations from embarking in such a struggle. At the commencement of the war the power of Spain overshadowed all Europe. Her infantry were regarded as irresistible. Italy and Germany were virtually her dependencies, and England was but a petty power beside her. Since Agincourt was fought we had taken but little part

in wars on the Continent. The feudal system was extinct; we had neither army nor military system; and the only Englishmen with the slightest experience of war were those who had gone abroad to seek their fortunes, and had fought in the armies of one or other of the continental powers. Nor were we yet aware of our naval strength. Drake and Hawkins and the other bucaneeers had not yet commenced their private war with Spain, on what was known as the Spanish main—the waters of the West Indian Islands—and no one dreamed that the time was approaching when England would be able to hold her own against the strength of Spain on the seas.

Thus, then, whatever the private sentiments of Elizabeth and her counsellors, they shrank from engaging England in a life and death struggle with the greatest power of the time; though as the struggle went on the queen's sympathy with the people of the Netherlands was more and more openly shown. In 1572 she was present at a parade of three hundred volunteers who mustered at Greenwich under Thomas Morgan and Roger Williams for service in the Netherlands. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, half-brother of Sir Walter Raleigh, went out a few months later with 1500 men, and from that time numbers of English volunteers continued to cross the seas and join in the struggle against the Spaniards. Nor were the sympathies of the queen confined to allowing her subjects to take part in the fighting; for she sent out large sums of money to the Dutch, and as far as she could, without openly joining them, gave them her aid.

Spain remonstrated continually against these breaches of neutrality, while the Dutch on their part constantly implored



her to join them openly; but she continued to give evasive answers to both parties until the assassination of William of Orange on 10th July, 1584, sent a thrill of horror through England, and determined the queen and her advisers to take a more decisive part in the struggle. In the following June envoys from the States arrived in London, and were received with great honour, and a treaty between the two countries was agreed upon. Three months later the queen published a declaration to her people and to Europe at large, setting forth the terrible persecutions and cruelties to which "our next neighbours, the people of the Low Countries," the special allies and friends of England, had been exposed, and stating her determination to aid them to recover their liberty. The proclamation concluded: "We mean not hereby to make particular profit to ourself and our people, only desiring to obtain, by God's favour, for the Countries, a deliverance of them from war by the Spaniards and foreigners, with a restitution of their ancient liberties and government."

Sir Thomas Cecil was sent out at once as governor of Brill, and Sir Philip Sidney as governor of Flushing, these towns being handed over to England as guarantees by the Dutch. These two officers, with bodies of troops to serve as garrisons, took charge of their respective fortresses in November. Orders were issued for the raising of an army for service in the Low Countries, and Dudley, Earl of Leicester, was appointed by the queen to its command. The decision of the queen was received with enthusiasm in England as well as in Holland, and although the Earl of Leicester was not personally popular, volunteers flocked to his standard.

Breakfast at Hedingham Rectory had been set at an earlier hour than usual on the 6th of December, 1585. There was an unusual stir and excitement in the village, for young Mr. Francis Vere, cousin of the Earl of Oxford, lord of Hedingham and of all the surrounding country, was to start that morning to ride to Colchester, there to join the Earl of Leicester and his following as a volunteer. As soon as breakfast was over young Geoffrey and Lionel Vickers, boys of fourteen and thirteen years old, proceeded to the castle close by, and there mounted the horses provided for them, and rode with Francis Vere to Colchester.

Francis, who was at this time twenty-five years old, was accompanied by his elder brother, John, and his two younger brothers, Robert and Horace, and by many other friends; and it was a gay train that cantered down the valley of the Colne to Colchester. That ancient town was all astir. Gentlemen had ridden in from all the country seats and manors for many miles round, and the quiet streets were alive with people. At two o'clock in the afternoon news arrived that the earl was approaching, and, headed by the bailiffs of the town in scarlet gowns, the multitude moved out to meet the earl on the Lexden road. Presently a long train was seen approaching; for with Leicester were the Earl of Essex, Lords North and Audley, Sir William Russell, Sir Thomas Shirley, and other volunteers, to the number of five hundred horse. All were gaily attired and caparisoned, and the cortège presented a most brilliant appearance. The multitude cheered lustily, the bailiffs presented an address, and followed by his own train and by the gentlemen who had assembled to meet him, the earl rode into the town. He

himself took up his abode at the house of Sir Thomas Lucas, while his followers were distributed among the houses of the townsfolk. Two hours after the arrival of the earl, the party from Hedingham took leave of Mr. Francis Vere.

"Good-bye, lads," he said to the young Vickars. "I will keep my promise, never fear; and if the struggle goes on till you are old enough to carry arms, I will, if I am still alive, take you under my leading and teach you the art of war."

Upon the following day the Earl of Leicester and his following rode to Manningtree, and took boat down the Stour to Harwich, where the fleet, under Admiral William Borough, was lying. Here they embarked, and on the 9th of December sailed for Flushing, where they were joined by another fleet of sixty ships from the Thames.

More than a year passed. The English had fought sturdily in Holland. Mr. Francis Vere had been with his cousin, Lord Willoughby, who was in command of Bergen-op-Zoom, and had taken part in the first brush with the enemy, when a party of the garrison marched out and attacked a great convoy of four hundred and fifty waggons going to Antwerp, killed three hundred of the enemy, took eighty prisoners, and destroyed all their waggons except twenty-seven, which they carried into the town. Leicester provisioned the town of Grave, which was besieged by the Duke of Parma, the Spanish commander-in-chief. Axel was captured by surprise, the volunteers swimming across the moat at night, and throwing open the gates. Doesburg was captured, and Zutphen besieged.

Parma marched to its relief, and, under cover of a thick fog, succeeded in getting close at hand before it was known

that he was near. Then the English knights and volunteers, 200 in number, mounted in hot haste and charged a great Spanish column of 5000 horse and foot. They were led by Sir William Russell, under whom were Lords Essex, North, Audley, and Willoughby, behind the last of whom rode Francis Vere. For two hours this little band of horse fought desperately in the midst of the Spanish cavalry, and forced them at last to fall back, but were themselves obliged to retreat when the Spanish infantry came up and opened fire upon them. The English loss was 34 killed and wounded, while 250 of the Spaniards were slain, and three of their colours captured. Among the wounded on the English side was the very noble knight Sir Philip Sidney, who was shot by a musket-ball, and died three weeks afterwards.

The successes of the English during these two years were counterbalanced by the cowardly surrender of Grave by its governor, and by the treachery of Sir William Stanley, governor of Deventer, and of Roland Yorke, who commanded the garrisons of the two forts known as the Zutphen Sconces. Both these officers turned traitors and delivered up the posts they commanded to the Spaniards. Their conduct not only caused great material loss to the allies, but it gave rise to much bad feeling between the English and Dutch, the latter complaining that they received but half-hearted assistance from the English.

It was not surprising, however, that Leicester was unable to effect more with the little force under his command, for it was necessary not only to raise soldiers, but to invent regulations and discipline. The Spanish system was adopted, and this, the first English regular army, was

trained and appointed precisely upon the system of the foe with whom they were fighting. It was no easy task to convert a body of brave knights and gentlemen and sturdy country men into regular troops, and to give them the advantages conferred by discipline and order. But the work was rendered the less difficult by the admixture of the volunteers who had been bravely fighting for ten years under Morgan, Rowland Williams, John Norris, and others. These had had a similar experience on their first arrival in Holland. Several times in their early encounters with the Spaniards the undisciplined young troops had behaved badly; but they had gained experience from their reverses, and had proved themselves fully capable of standing in line even against the splendid pikemen of Spain.

While the English had been drilling and fighting in Holland things had gone on quietly at Hedingham. The village stands near the head waters of the Colne and Stour, in a rich and beautiful country. On a rising ground behind it stood the castle of the Veres, which was approached from the village by a drawbridge across the moat. There were few more stately piles in England than the seat of the Earl of Oxford. On one side of the great quadrangle was the gatehouse and a lofty tower, on another the great hall and chapel and the kitchens, on a third the suites of apartments of the officials and retinue. In rear were the stables and granaries, the butts and tennis-court, beyond which was the court of the tournaments.

In the centre of the quadrangle rose the great keep, which still stands, the finest relic of Norman civil architecture in England. It possessed great strength, and at

the same time was richly ornamented with carving. The windows, arches, and fireplaces were decorated with chevron carvings. A beautiful spiral pattern enriched the doorway and pillars of the staircase leading to galleries cut in the thickness of the wall, with arched openings looking into the hall below. The outlook from the keep extended over the parishes of Castle Hedingham, Sybil Hedingham, Kirby, and Tilbury, all belonging to the Veres—whose property extended far down the pretty valley of the Stour—with the stately Hall of Long Melford, the Priory of Clare, and the little town of Lavenham; indeed the whole country was dotted with the farmhouses and manors of the Veres. Seven miles down the valley of the Colne lies the village of Earl's Colne, with the priory, where ten of the earls of Oxford lie buried with their wives.

The parish church of Castle Hedingham stood at the end of the little village street, and the rectory of Mr. Vickars was close by. The party gathered at morning prayers consisted of Mr. Vickars and his wife, their two sons, Geoffrey and Lionel, and the maid-servants, Ruth and Alice. The boys, now fourteen and fifteen years old respectively, were strong-grown and sturdy lads, and their father had long since owned with a sigh that neither of them was likely to follow his profession and fill the pulpit at Hedingham Church when he was gone. Nor was this to be wondered at, for lying as it did at the entrance to the great castle of the Veres, the street of the little village was constantly full of armed men, and resounded with the tramp of the horses of richly-dressed knights and gay ladies.

Here came great politicians, who sought the friendship and support of the powerful earls of Oxford, nobles and knights, their kinsmen and allies, gentlemen from the wide-spreading manors of the family, stout fighting-men who wished to enlist under their banner. At night the sound of music from the castle told of gay entertainments and festive dances, while by day parties of knights and ladies with dogs and falcons sallied out to seek sport over the wide domains. It could hardly be expected, then, that lads of spirit, brought up in the midst of sights and sounds like these, should entertain a thought of settling down to the tranquil life of the church. As long as they could remember, their minds had been fixed upon being soldiers, and fighting some day under the banner of the Veres. They had been a good deal in the castle; for Mr. Vickars had assisted Arthur Golding, the learned instructor to young Edward Vere, the 17th earl, who was born in 1550, and had succeeded to the title at the age of twelve, and he had afterwards been tutor to the earl's cousins, John, Francis, Robert, and Horace, the sons of Geoffrey, fourth son of the 15th earl. These boys were born in 1558, 1560, 1562, and 1565, and lived with their mother at Kirby Hall, a mile from the Castle of Hedingham.

The earl was much attached to his old instructor, and when he was at the castle there was scarce a day but an invitation came down for Mr. Vickars and his wife to be present either at banquet or entertainment. The boys were free to come and go as they chose, and the earl's men-at-arms had orders to afford them all necessary teaching in the use of weapons.

Mr. Vickars considered it his duty to accept the invitations of his friend and patron, but he sorely grudged the time so abstracted from his favourite books. It was, indeed, a relief to him when the earl, whose love of profusion and luxury made serious inroads even into the splendid possessions of the Veres, went up to court, and peace and quietness reigned in the castle. The rector was fonder of going to Kirby, where John, Geoffrey's eldest son, lived quietly and soberly, his three younger brothers having, when mere boys, embraced the profession of arms, placing themselves under the care of the good soldier Sir William Browne, who had served for many years in the Low Countries. They occasionally returned home for a time, and were pleased to take notice of the sons of their old tutor, although Geoffrey was six years junior to Horace, the youngest of the brothers.

The young Vickars had much time to themselves, much more indeed than their mother considered to be good for them. After their breakfast, which was finished by eight o'clock, their father took them for an hour and heard the lessons they had prepared the day before, and gave them instruction in the Latin tongue. Then they were supposed to study till the bell rang for dinner at twelve; but there was no one to see that they did so, for their father seldom came outside his library door, and their mother was busy with her domestic duties and in dispensing simples to the poor people, who, now that the monasteries were closed, had no medical aid save that which they got from the wives of the gentry or ministers, or from the wise women, of whom there was generally one in every village.



Therefore, after half an hour, or at most an hour, spent in getting up their tasks, the books would be thrown aside, and the boys be off, either to the river or up to the castle to practise sword-play with the men-at-arms, or to the butts with their bows, or to the rabbit-warren, where they had leave from the earl to go with their dogs whenever they pleased. Their long excursions were, however, generally deferred until after dinner, as they were then free until supper-time, and even if they did not return after that hour Mrs. Vickars did not chide them unduly, being an easy-going woman, and always ready to make excuses for them.

There were plenty of fish in the river; and the boys knew the pools they loved best, and often returned with their baskets well filled. There were otters on its banks, too; but, though they sometimes chased these pretty creatures, Tan and Turk, their two dogs, knew as well as their masters that they had but small chance of catching them. Sometimes they would take a boat at the bridge and drop down the stream for miles, and once or twice had even gone down to Bricklesey [Footnote: Now Brightlingsea.] at the mouth of the river. This, however, was an expedition that they never performed alone, making it each time in charge of Master Lirriper, who owned a flat barge, and took produce down to Bricklesey, there to be transhipped into coasters bound for London. He had a married daughter there, and it was at her house the boys had slept when they went there; for the journey down and up again was too long to be performed in a single day.

But this was not the only distant expedition they had made, for they had once gone down the Stour as far as

Harwich with their father when he was called thither on business. To them Harwich with its old walls and the houses crowded up within them, and its busy port with vessels coming in and going out, was most delightful, and they always talked about that expedition as one of the most pleasant recollections of their lives.

After breakfast was over on 1st of May, 1587, and they had done their lessons with their father, and had worked for an hour by themselves, the boys put by their books and strolled down the village to the bridge. There as usual stood their friend Master Lirriper with his hands deep in his pockets, a place and position in which he was sure to be found when not away in his barge.

"Good-morning, Master Lirriper."

"Good-morning, Master Geoffrey and Master Lionel."

"So you are not down the river to-day?"

"No, sir. I am going to-morrow, and this time I shall be away four or five days—maybe even a week."

"Shall you?" the boys exclaimed in surprise. "Why, what are you going to do?"

"I am going round to London in my nephew Joe Chambers' craft."

"Are you really?" Geoffrey exclaimed. "I wish we were going with you.

Don't you think you could take us, Master Lirriper?"

The bargeman looked down into the water and frowned. He was slow of speech, but as the minutes went on and he did not absolutely refuse the boys exchanged glances of excitement and hope.

"I dunno how that might be, young sirs," John Lirriper said slowly, after long cogitation. "I dus-say my nephew would have no objection, but what would parson say about it?"

"Oh, I don't think he would object," Geoffrey said. "If you go up and ask him, Master Lirriper, and say that you will take care of us, you know, I don't see why he should say no."

"Like enough you would be ill," John Lirriper said after another long pause. "It's pretty rough sometimes."

"Oh, we shouldn't mind that," Lionel protested. "We should like to see the waves and to be in a real ship."

"It's nothing much of a ship," the boatman said. "She is a ketch of about ten tons and carries three hands."

"Oh, we don't care how small she is if we can only go in her; and you would be able to show us London, and we might even see the queen. Oh, do come up with us and ask father, Master Lirriper."

"Perhaps parson wouldn't be pleased, young sirs, and might say I was putting wandering thoughts into your heads; and Mistress Vickars might think it a great liberty on my part."

"Oh, no, she wouldn't, Master Lirriper. Besides, we will say we asked you."

"But suppose any harm comes to you, what would they say to me then?"

"Oh, there's no fear of any harm coming to us. Besides, in another year or two we mean to go over to the Low Countries and fight the Spaniards, and what's a voyage to London to that?"

"Well, I will think about it," John Lirriper said cautiously.

"No no, Master Lirriper; if you get thinking about it it will never be done. Do come up with us at once," and each of them got hold of one of the boatman's arms.

"Well, the parson can but say no," he said, as he suffered himself to be dragged away. "And I don't say as it isn't reasonable that you should like to see something of the world, young sirs; but I don't know how the parson will take it."

Mr. Vickars looked up irritably from his books when the servant came in and said that Master Lirriper wished to see him.

"What does he want at this hour?" he said. "You know, Ruth, I never see people before dinner. Any time between that and supper I am at their service, but it's too bad being disturbed now."

"I told him so, sir; but Master Geoffrey and Master Lionel were with him, and they said he wanted particular to see you, and they wanted particular too."

The clergyman sighed as he put his book down.

"If Geoffrey and Lionel have concerned themselves in the matter, Ruth, I suppose I must see the man; but it's very hard being disturbed like this. Well, Master Lirriper, what is it?" he asked, as the boatman accompanied by Geoffrey and Lionel entered the room. Master Lirriper twirled his hat in his hand. Words did not come easily to him at the best of times, and this was a business that demanded thought and care. Long before he had time to fix upon an appropriate form of words Geoffrey broke in:

"This is what it is, father. Master Lirriper is going down the river to Brickleyse to-morrow, and then he is going on board his nephew's ship. She is a ketch, and she carries ten tons, though I don't know what it is she carries; and she's going to London, and he is going in her, and he says if you will let him he will take us with him, and will show us London, and take great care of us. It will be glorious, father, if you will only let us go."

Mr. Vickers looked blankly as Geoffrey poured out his torrent of words. His mind was still full of the book he had been reading, and he hardly took in the meaning of Geoffrey's words.

"Going in a ketch!" he repeated. "Going to catch something, I suppose you mean? Do you mean he is going fishing?"

"No, father,—going in a ketch. A ketch is a sort of ship, father, though I don't quite know what sort of ship. What sort of ship is a ketch, Master Lirriper?"

"A ketch is a two-masted craft, Master Geoffrey," John Lirriper said.

"She carries a big mizzen sail."

"There, you see, father," Geoffrey said triumphantly; "she carries a big mizzen sail. That's what she is, you see; and he is going to show us London, and will take great care of us if you will let us go with him."

"Do you mean, Master Lirriper," Mr. Vickers asked slowly, "that you are going to London in some sort of ship, and want to take my sons with you?"

"Well, sir, I am going to London, and the young masters seemed to think that they would like to go with me, if so be

you would have no objection."

"I don't know," Mr. Vicars said. "It is a long passage, Master Lirriper; and, as I have heard, often a stormy one. I don't think my wife—"

"Oh, yes, father," Lionel broke in. "If you say yes, mother is sure to say yes; she always does, you know. And, you see, it will be a great thing for us to see London. Every one else seems to have seen London, and I am sure that it would do us good. And we might even see the queen."

"I think that they would be comfortable, sir," John Lirriper put in. "You see, my nephew's wife is daughter of a citizen, one Master Swindon, a ship's chandler, and he said there would be a room there for me, and they would make me heartily welcome. Now, you see, sir, the young masters could have that room, and I could very well sleep on board the ketch; and they would be out of all sort of mischief there."

"That would be a very good plan certainly, Master Lirriper. Well, well, I don't know what to say."

"Say yes, father," Geoffrey said as he saw Mr. Vickars glance anxiously at the book he had left open. "If you say yes, you see it will be a grand thing for you, our being away for a week with nothing to disturb you."

"Well, well," Mr. Vickars said, "you must ask your mother. If she makes no objection, then I suppose you can go," and Mr. Vickars hastily took up his book again.

The boys ran off to the kitchen, where their mother was superintending the brewing of some broth for a sick woman down the village.

"Mother!" Geoffrey exclaimed, "Master Lirriper's going to London in a ketch—a ship with a big mizzen sail, you know—and he has offered to take us with him and show us London. And father has said yes, and it's all settled if you have no objection; and of course you haven't."

"Going to London, Geoffrey!" Mrs. Vicars exclaimed aghast. "I never heard of such a thing. Why, like enough you will be drowned on the way and never come back again. Your father must be mad to think of such a thing."

"Oh, no, mother; I am sure it will do us a lot of good. And we may see the queen, mother. And as for drowning, why, we can both swim ever so far. Besides, people don't get drowned going to London. Do they Master Lirriper?"

John was standing bashfully at the door of the kitchen. "Well, not as a rule, Master Geoffrey," he replied. "They comes and they goes, them that are used to it, maybe a hundred times without anything happening to them."

"There! You hear that, mother? They come and go hundreds of times. Oh, I am sure you are not going to say no. That would be too bad when father has agreed to it. Now, mother, please tell Ruth to run away at once and get a wallet packed with our things. Of course we shall want our best clothes; because people dress finely in London, and it would never do if we saw the queen and we hadn't our best doublets on, for she would think that we didn't know what was seemly down at Hedingham."

"Well, my dears, of course if it is all settled—"

"Oh, yes, mother, it is quite all settled."

"Then it's no use my saying anything more about it, but I think your father might have consulted me before he gave

his consent to your going on such a hazardous journey as this.

"He did want to consult you, mother. But then, you see, he wanted to consult his books even more, and he knew very well that you would agree with him; and you know you would too. So please don't say anything more about it, but let Ruth run upstairs and see to our things at once. There, you see, Master Lirriper, it is all settled. And what time do you start to-morrow? We will be there half an hour before, anyhow."

"I shall go at seven from the bridge. Then I shall just catch the turn of the tide and get to Bricklesey in good time."

"I never did see such boys," Mrs. Vickars said when John Lirriper had gone on his way. "As for your father, I am surprised at him in countenancing you. You will be running all sorts of risks. You may be drowned on the way, or killed in a street brawl, or get mixed up in a plot. There is no saying what may not happen. And here it is all settled before I have even time to think about it, which is most inconsiderate of your father."

"Oh, we shall get back again without any harm, mother. And as to getting killed in a street brawl, Lionel and I can use our hangers as well as most of them. Besides, nothing of that sort is going to happen to us. Now, mother, please let Ruth go at once, and tell her to put up our puce doublets that we had for the jousting at the castle, and our red hose and our dark green cloth slashed trunks."

"There is plenty of time for that, Geoffrey, as you are not going until to-morrow. Besides, I can't spare Ruth now, but



she shall see about it after dinner."

There was little sleep for the boys that night. A visit to London had long been one of their wildest ambitions, and they could scarcely believe that thus suddenly and without preparation it was about to take place. Their father had some time before promised that he would some day make request to one or other of the young Veres to allow them to ride to London in his suite, but the present seemed to them an even more delightful plan. There would be the pleasure of the voyage, and moreover it would be much more lively for them to be able to see London under the charge of John Lirriper than to be subject to the ceremonial and restraint that would be enforced in the household of the Veres. They were then at the appointed place a full hour before the time named, with wallets containing their clothes, and a basket of provisions that their mother had prepared for them. Having stowed these away in the little cabin, they walked up and down impatiently until Master Lirriper himself appeared.

"You are up betimes, my young masters," the boatman said. "The church has not yet struck seven o'clock."

"We have been here ever so long, Master Lirriper. We could not sleep much last night, and got up when it chimed five, being afraid that we might drop off to sleep and be late."

"Well, we shall not be long before we are off. Here comes my man Dick, and the tide is just on the turn. The sky looks bright, and the weather promises well. I will just go round to the cottage and fetch up my things, and then we shall be ready."

In ten minutes they pushed off from the shore. John and his man got out long poles shod with iron, and with these set to work to punt the barge along. Now that they were fairly on their way the boys quieted down, and took their seats on the sacks of flour with which the boat was laden, and watched the objects on the bank as the boat made her way quietly along.

Halstead was the first place passed. This was the largest town near Hedingham, and was a place of much importance in their eyes. Then they passed Stanstead Hall and Earl's Colne on their right, Colne Wake on their left, and Chapel Parish on their right. Then there was a long stretch without any large villages, until they came in sight of the bridge above Colchester. A few miles below the town the river began to widen. The banks were low and flat, and they were now entering an arm of the sea. Half an hour later the houses and church of Brickley came in sight. Tide was almost low when they ran on to the mud abreast of the village, but John put on a pair of high boots and carried the boys ashore one after the other on his back, and then went up with them to the house where they were to stop for the night.

Here, although not expected, they were heartily welcomed by John's daughter.

"If father had told me that you had been coming, Masters Vickars, I would have had a proper dinner for you; but though he sent word yesterday morning that he should be over today, he did not say a word about your coming with them."

"He did not know himself," Geoffrey said; "it was only settled at ten o'clock yesterday. But do not trouble yourself about the dinner. In the first place, we are so pleased at going that we don't care a bit what we eat, and in the second place we had breakfast on board the boat, and we were both so hungry that I am sure we could go till supper-time without eating if necessary."

"Where are you going, father?" the young woman asked.

"I am going to set about unloading the flour."

"Why, it's only a quarter to twelve, and dinner just ready. The fish went into the frying-pan as you came up from the boat. You know we generally dine at half-past eleven, but we saw you coming at a distance and put it off. It's no use your starting now."

"Well, I suppose it isn't. And I don't know what the young masters' appetite may be, but mine is pretty good, I can tell you."

"I never knew it otherwise, father," the woman laughed, "Ah, here is my Sam. Sam, here's father brought these two young gentlemen. They are the sons of Mr. Vickars, the parson at Hedingham. They are going to stop here to-night, and are going with him in the *Susan* to-morrow to London."

"Glad to see you, young masters," Sam said. "I have often heard Ann talk of your good father. I have just been on board the *Susan*, for I am sending up a couple of score sides of bacon in her, and have been giving Joe Chambers, her master, a list of things he is to get there and bring down for me. Now then, girl, bustle about and get dinner on as soon as you can. We are half an hour late. I am sure the young

gentlemen here must be hungry. There's nothing like being on the water for getting an appetite."

A few minutes later a great dish of fish, a loaf of bread and some wooden platters, were placed on the table, and all set to at once. Forks had not yet come into use, and tablecloths were unknown, except among the upper classes. The boys found that in spite of their hearty breakfast their appetites were excellent. The fish were delicious, the bread was home-baked, and the beer from Colchester, which was already famous for its brewing. When they had finished, John Lirriper asked them if they would rather see what there was to be seen in the village, or go off to the ketch. They at once chose the latter alternative. On going down to the water's edge they found that the tide had risen sufficiently to enable Dick to bring the barge alongside the jetty. They were soon on board.

"Which is the *Susan*, Master Lirriper?"

"That's her lying out there with two others. She is the one lowest down the stream. We shall just fetch her comfortably."

## CHAPTER II.

### Table of Contents

## A MEETING IN CHEPE.

A row of ten minutes took the boat with Master Lirriper and the two boys alongside the ketch.

"How are you, Joe Chambers?" Master Lirriper hailed the skipper as he appeared on the deck of the *Susan*. "I have brought you two more passengers for London. They are going there under my charge."

"The more the merrier, Uncle John," the young skipper replied. "There are none others going this journey, so though our accommodation is not very extensive, we can put them up comfortably enough if they don't mind roughing it."

"Oh, we don't mind that," Geoffrey said, as they climbed on board; "besides, there seems lots of room."

"Not so much as you think," the skipper replied. "She is a roomy craft is the *Susan*; but she is pretty nigh all hold, and we are cramped a little in the fo'castle. Still we can sleep six, and that's just the number we shall have, for we carry a man and a boy besides myself. I think your flour will about fill her up, Master Lirriper. We have a pretty full cargo this time."

"Well, we shall soon see," John Lirriper said. "Are you ready to take the flour on board at once? Because, if so, we will begin to discharge."

"Yes, I am quite ready. You told me you were going to bring forty sacks, and I have left the middle part of the hold empty for them. Sam Hunter's bacon will stow in on the top of your sacks, and just fill her up to the beams there, as I reckon. I'll go below and stow them away as you hand them across."

In an hour the sacks of flour were transferred from the barge to the hold of the *Susan*, and the sides of bacon then placed upon them.

"It's a pity we haven't all the rest of the things on board," the skipper said, "and then we could have started by this evening's tide instead of waiting till the morning. The wind is fair, and I hate throwing away a fair wind. There is no saying where it may blow to-morrow, but I shouldn't be at all surprised if it isn't round to the south, and that will be foul for us till we get pretty nigh up into the mouth of the river. However, I gave them till to-night for getting all their things on board, and must therefore wait."

To the boys the *Susan* appeared quite a large craft, for there was not water up at Hedingham for vessels of her size; and though they had seen ships at Harwich, they had never before put foot on anything larger than Master Lirriper's barge. The *Susan* was about forty feet long by twelve feet beam, and drew, as her skipper informed them, near five feet of water. She was entirely decked. The cabin in the bows occupied some fourteen feet in length. The rest was devoted to cargo. They descended into the cabin, which