

CHAPTER I
THE LUTERANO¹

“ Still climbing trees in the Hesperides.”
Love’s Labour’s Lost, iv. 3
(1564)

’T WAS in the summer of 1564, I think, that I first got a hint of the quality of my play-fellow. Our land in those days was at peace with Spain; but both sides watched each other like sheep-dogs at a fair, waiting to spring on the first show of offence. For had not that gracious and magnificent lady, our Queen Gloriana, scoffed at the suit of His Catholic and Spanish Majesty, who was little used to rebuffs from man or woman? Likewise, the Queen of Scots was threatening alarms from the north, so it became all good lovers of England to keep their blades keen against evils to come. We were a band of five in the Otter valley, lads much an age: myself, the eldest, not yet turned thirteen. There was Dick Champernoun from Clyst, the hardest hitter and the lustiest of the band. I see yet his yellow tumbled hair, and the steady grey eyes which death glazed five years later on the field of Moncontour. There was Humphrey Sneyd from ten miles up the water, who would ride down on a pony to our Saturday’s sports with tales of the moormen and the outlandish ways of the hill country. There was Harry Duke, too, from Otterton, a silent lad, and the best to handle a boat I have ever known. Indeed, his true fellows were the sailor folk of Budleigh; for any hours he could snatch from his schooling he was off to the bass-fishing, or driving his little ketch in the worst gales of our parts. He had been east to Poole and west to Plymouth, but already he was sated with our coasts and burned for the high seas.

And last there was Walter Raleigh from Hayes Barton, the youngest of the four, and as silent as Harry Duke, but with a different manner of silence. He was the only scholar in our band, and turned to his books as readily as to a horse or a full river. He had a fine face, with the soft colour of a maid, and a low delicate voice. But there was that in his blue eyes which kindled at times into naked devilry; and at such seasons, though the youngest, none dared gainsay his leadership. ’Twas he who first leaped the awful chasm called Tamsin’s Gap, and one winter day swam the roaring Otter because I had questioned his valour. ’Twas he, too, who at Bixton Fair, when the sailors and the moormen came to blows, headed a rally with a blunt hanger and sent the hill-folk scurrying out of the town.

But to my tale. The summer of the year I speak of was hot and dry, so that we lads from the landward parts were fain to go often to the shore to swim and get the cool airs from the water, while we watched for great ships passing out Channel. Now at the little port of Budleigh there is an inn, The Flying Hinde its name, much frequented of merchants and travellers, and a place of resort, too, for the townsfolk and the neighbouring gentlemen. Opposite the inn, fronting on the sea, is a hillock of green grass with a little flagstaff atop of it, from which the eye has a noble prospect over the bay of Otter and out into the narrow seas. It was a pleasant place of a summer afternoon, with the bees droning in the hot thyme and the gulls crying. The potman from The Flying Hinde would fetch tankards of ale, and any day about four o’clock you would find a bench of old seafarers telling tales of the great deep. To such tales we lads loved to listen – Dick and Humphrey each prone on his face with a stem of grass between his lips, Harry walking restlessly with his eyes on the sea, and Walter Raleigh sitting with hands clasping knees, his gaze dwelling hungrily on the face of the narrator.²

On this afternoon there were but two on the hill. One was Noah Stubbs, an ancient sailor-man,

1 This story was told by Sir John Buller, Knight, of Newkerne, in Devon, to his grandson Jack, who when he grew older wrote it down in a book. A second Jack, great-grandson of the first, used to read it on summer Sunday afternoons to his nephews and great-nephews, one of whom remembered it and long afterwards told it to me.

2 [See the painting “The Boyhood of Raleigh by John Everett Millais.]