A Report of the Truth of the Fight About the Isles of Azores
This Last Summer¹ Betwixt the Revenge,² One of Her Majesty's Ships, and an Armada³ of the King of Spain

Because the rumors are diversely spread, as well in England as in the Low Countries and elsewhere, of this late encounter between her Majesty's ships and the Armada of Spain; and that the Spaniards according to their usual manner fill the world with their vainglorious vaunts, making great appearance of victories, when on the contrary themselves are most commonly and shamefully beaten and dishonored; thereby hoping to possess the ignorant multitude by anticipating and forerunning false reports; it is agreeable with all good reason, for manifestation of the truth, to overcome falsehood and untruth, that the beginning, continuance, and success of this late honorable encounter of Sir Richard Grenville⁴ and other her Majesty's captains, with the Armada of Spain, should be truly set down and published without partiality or false imaginations. And it is no marvel that the Spaniard should seek by false and slanderous pamphlets, advisoes, and letters, to cover their own loss and to derogate from others their due honors, especially in this fight being performed far off; seeing they were not ashamed in the year 1588, when they purposed the invasion of this land, to publish in sundry languages, in print, great victories in words, which they pleaded to have obtained against this realm; and spread the same in a most false sort over all parts of France, Italy, and elsewhere. When shortly after it was happily manifested in very deed to all nations how their navy, which they termed invincible, consisting of 140 sail⁵ of ships, not only of their own kingdom but strengthened with the greatest argosies, Portugal carracks,⁶ Florentines, and huge hulks of other countries, were by thirty of her Majesty's own ships of war, and a few of our own merchants, by the wise, valiant, and most advantageous conduction of the Lord Charles Howard, high admiral of England, beaten and shuffled together; even from the Lizard in Cornwall, first to Portland, where they shamefully left Don Pedro de Valdes with his mighty ship; from Portland to Calais, where they lost Hugo de Moncado, with the gallias⁷ of which he was captain; and from Calais driven with squibs⁸ from their anchors, were chased out of the sight of England, round about Scotland and Ireland. Where for the sympathy of their barbarous religion, hoping to find succor and assistance, a great part of them were crushed against the rocks, and those others that landed, being very many in number, were notwithstanding broken, slain, and taken, and so sent from village to village, coupled in halters, to be shipped into England. Where her

¹. 1591.
². A ship of 500 tons and 250 men. It had been Drake's ship in the fight with the Armada, 1588.
³. A fleet of armed ships. Raleigh also uses the term for a single warship.
⁵. Raleigh wrote "240"; the correction is Hakluyt's.
⁶. Large ships.
⁷. Galleys.
⁸. Exploding shot.
Majesty of her princely and invincible disposition disdaining to put them to death, and scorning either to retain or entertain them, they were all sent back again to their countries, to witness and recount the worthy achievements of their invincible and dreadful navy. Of which the number of soldiers, the fearful burthen of their ships, the commanders’ names of every squadron, with all other their magazines of provisions, were put in print, as an army and navy irresistible and disdaining prevention.9 With all which so great and terrible an ostentation they did not in all their sailing round about England so much as sink or take one ship, bark, pinnace,1 or cockboat2 of ours, or ever burned so much as one sheepcote of this land. Whenas on the contrary Sir Francis Drake, with only eight hundred soldiers, not long before landed in their Indies and forced Santiago, Santo Domingo, Cartagena, and the forts of Florida. And after that Sir John Norris marched from Peniche in Portugal, with a handful of soldiers, to the gates of Lisbon, being above forty English miles. Where the earl of Essex himself and other valiant gentlemen braved the city of Lisbon, encamped at the very gates; from whence after many days’ abode, finding neither promised party nor provision to batter,3 they made retreat by land in despite of all their garrisons both of horse and foot.

In this sort I have a little digressed from my first purpose, only by the necessary comparison of theirs and our actions; the one covetous of honor without vaunt of ostentation; the other so greedy to purchase the opinion of their own affairs and by false rumors to resist the blasts of their own dishonors as they will not only not blush to spread all manner of untruths, but even for the least advantage, be it but for the taking of one poor adventurer of the English, will celebrate the victory with bonfires in every town, always spending more in faggots than the purchase was worth they obtained. Whenas we never yet thought it worth the consumption of two billets when we have taken eight or ten of their Indian ships at one time and twenty of the Brazil fleet. Such is the difference between true valor and ostentation, and between honorable actions and frivolous vainglorious vaunts. But now to return to my first purpose.

The Lord Thomas Howard, with six of her Majesty’s ships, six victualers4 of London, the bark Ralegh, and two or three pinnaces, riding at anchor near unto Flores, one of the westerly islands of the Azores, the last of August in the afternoon, had intelligence by one Captain Middleton of the approach of the Spanish Armada. Which Middleton being in a very good sailer had kept them company three days before, of good purpose, both to discover their forces the more, as also to give advice to my Lord Thomas of their approach. He had no sooner delivered the news but the fleet was in sight.

Many of our ships’ companies were on shore in the island, some providing ballast for their ships, others filling of water and refreshing themselves from the land with such things as they could either for money or by force recover. By reason whereof our ships being all pestered and roomaging,5 everything out of order, very light for want of ballast. And that which was most to our disadvantage, the one-half part of the men of every ship sick and utterly unserviceable. For in the Revenge there were ninety diseased; in the Bonaventure not so many in health as could handle her mainsail. For had not twenty men

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1. A small two-masted ship.
2. Dory or lifeboat.
3. Seize upon, strike.
4. Supply ships.
5. Busied with various occupations, and the cargo not arranged.
been taken out of a bark of Sir George Cary’s, his being commanded to be sunk, and those appointed to her, she had hardly ever recovered England. The rest for the most part were in little better state. The names of her Majesty’s ships were these as followeth: the *Defiance*, which was admiral, the *Revenge*, vice-admiral, the *Bonaventure* commanded by Captain Cross, the *Lion* by George Fenner, the *Foresight* by Mr. Thomas Vavasour, and the *Crane* by Duffield. The *Foresight* and the *Crane* being but small ships; only the other were of the middle size; the rest, besides the bark *Ralegh* commanded by Captain Thin, were victualers and of small force or none.

The Spanish fleet having shrouded their approach by reason of the island, were now so soon at hand as our ships had scarce time to weigh their anchors, but some of them were driven to let slip their cables and set sail. Sir Richard Grenville was the last weighed, to recover the men that were upon the island, which otherwise had been lost. The Lord Thomas with the rest very hardly recovered the wind, which Sir Richard Grenville not being able to do was persuaded by the master and others to cut his mainsail and cast about, and to trust to the sailing of his ship; for the squadron of Seville were on his weather bow. But Sir Richard utterly refused to turn from the enemy, alleging that he would rather choose to die than to dishonor himself, his country, and her Majesty’s ship, persuading his company that he would pass through the two squadrons in despite of them, and enforce those of Seville to give him way. Which he performed upon divers of the foremost, who, as the mariners term it, sprang their luff, and fell under the lee of the *Revenge*. But the other course had been the better, and might right well have been answered in so great an impossibility of prevailing. Notwithstanding, out of the greatness of his mind he could not be persuaded.

In the meanwhile as he attended those which were nearest him, the great *San Philip* being in the wind of him and coming towards him becalmed his sails in such sort as the ship could neither make way nor feel the helm, so huge and high cargoed was the Spanish ship, being of a thousand and five hundred tons. Who after laid the *Revenge* aboard. When he was thus bereft of his sails, the ships that were under his lee, luffing up, also laid him aboard; of which the next was the admiral of the Biscaines, a very mighty and puissant ship commanded by Brittandona. The said *Philip* carried three tier of ordnance on a side, and eleven pieces in every tier. She shot eight forthright out of her chase, besides those of her stern ports.

After the *Revenge* was entangled with this *Philip*, four other boarded her; two on her larboard and two on her starboard. The fight thus beginning at three of the clock in the afternoon continued very terrible all that evening. But the great *San Philip* having received the lower tier of the *Revenge*, discharged with crossbarshot, shifted herself with all diligence from her sides, utterly misliking her first entertainment. Some say that the ship foundered, but we cannot report it for truth unless we were assured.

The Spanish ships were filled with companies of soldiers, in some two hundred besides the mariners, in some five, in others eight hundred. In ours there were none at all, beside the mariners, but the servants of the commanders and some few voluntary gentlemen only. After many interchanged volleys of great

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6. Headed into the wind too far.  
7. Justified.  
8. Came alongside.  
1. A ball with projecting bars.
ordnance and small shot, the Spaniards deliberated to enter the Revenge, and made divers attempts, hoping to force her by the multitudes of their armed soldiers and musketeers, but were still repulsed again and again, and at all times beaten back into their own ships or into the seas.

In the beginning of the fight the George Noble of London, having received some shot through her by the armadas, fell under the lee of the Revenge and asked Sir Richard what he would command him, being but one of the victualers and of small force. Sir Richard bid him save himself and leave him to his fortune.

After the fight had thus without intermission continued while the day lasted and some hours of the night, many of our men were slain and hurt, and one of the great galleons of the armada and the admiral of the hulks both sunk, and in many other of the Spanish ships great slaughter was made. Some write that Sir Richard was very dangerously hurt almost in the beginning of the fight and lay speechless for a time ere he recovered. But two of the Revenge’s own company, brought home in a ship of lime from the islands, examined by some of the lords and others, affirmed that he was never so wounded as that he forsook the upper deck, till an hour before midnight; and then being shot into the body with a musket, as he was a-dressing was again shot into the head, and withal his chirurgeon wounded to death. This agreeeth also with an examination taken by Sir Francis Godolphin of four other mariners of the same ship being returned, which examination the said Sir Francis sent unto Master William Killigrew of her Majesty’s privy chamber.

But to return to the fight, the Spanish ships which attempted to board the Revenge, as they were wounded and beaten off, so always others came in their places, she having never less than two mighty galleons by her sides and aboard her. So that ere the morning, from three of the clock the day before, there had fifteen several armadas assailed her; and all so ill approved their entertainment as they were by the break of day far more willing to hearken to a composition than hastily to make any more assaults or entries. But as the day increased, so our men decreased; and as the light grew more and more, by so much more grew our discomforts. For none appeared in sight but enemies, saving one small ship called the Pilgrim, commanded by Jacob Whiddon, who hovered all night to see the success, but in the morning bearing with the Revenge, was hunted like a hare amongst many ravenous hounds, but escaped.

All the powder of the Revenge to the last barrel was now spent, all her pikes broken, forty of her best men slain, and the most part of the rest hurt. In the beginning of the fight she had but one hundred free from sickness, and four-score and ten sick, laid in hold upon the ballast. A small troop to man such a ship, and a weak garrison to resist so mighty an army. By those hundred all was sustained, the volleys, boardings, and enterings of fifteen ships of war, besides those which beat her at large. On the contrary, the Spanish were always supplied with soldiers brought from every squadron; all manner of arms and powder at will. Unto ours there remained no comfort at all, no hope, no supply either of ships, men, or weapons; the masts all beaten overboard, all her tackle cut asunder, her upper work altogether razed, and in effect evened she was with the water, but the very foundation or bottom of a ship, nothing being left overhead either for fight or defense.

Sir Richard, finding himself in this distress and unable any longer to make

2. Chief of the supply ships.
FIGHT WITH THE ARMADA

resistance, having endured in this fifteen hours’ fight the assault of fifteen several armadas all by turns aboard him, and by estimation eight hundred shot of great artillery, besides many assaults and entries; and that himself and the ship must needs be possessed by the enemy, who were now all cast in a ring round him, the Revenge not able to move one way or other but as she was moved with the waves and billow of the sea; commanded the master gunner, whom he knew to be a most resolute man, to split and sink the ship; that thereby nothing might remain of glory or victory to the Spaniards, seeing in so many hours’ fight and with so great a navy they were not able to take her, having had fifteen hours’ time, above ten thousand³ men, and fifty-and-three sail of men-of-war to perform it withal; and persuaded the company, or as many as he could induce, to yield themselves unto God and to the mercy of none else, but as they had like valiant resolute men repulsed so many enemies they should not now shorten the honor of their nation by prolonging their own lives for a few hours or a few days.

The master gunner readily condescended, and divers others; but the captain and the master were of another opinion, and besought Sir Richard to have care of them; alleging that the Spaniard would be as ready to entertain a composition as they were willing to offer the same; and that there being divers sufficient and valiant men yet living, and whose wounds were not mortal, they might do their country and prince acceptable service hereafter. And that whereas Sir Richard had alleged that the Spaniards should never glory to have taken one ship of her Majesty, seeing that they had so long and so notably defended themselves, they answered that the ship had six foot water in hold, three shot under water which were so weakly stopped as with the first working of the sea she must needs sink, and was besides so crushed and bruised as she could never be removed out of the place.

And as the matter was thus in dispute, and Sir Richard refusing to hearken to any of those reasons, the master of the Revenge (while the captain won unto him the greater party) was conveyed aboard the general, Don Alfonso Baçan. Who finding none overhasty to enter the Revenge again, doubting lest Sir Richard would have blown them up and himself, and perceiving by the report of the master of the Revenge his dangerous disposition, yielded that all their lives should be saved, the company sent for England, and the better sort to pay such reasonable ransom as their estate would bear, and in the mean season to be free from galley or imprisonment. To this he so much the rather condescended as well, as I have said, for fear of further loss and mischief to themselves, as also for the desire he had to recover Sir Richard Grenville; whom for his notable valor he seemed greatly to honor and admire.

When this answer was returned, and that safety of life was promised, the common sort being now at the end of their peril, the most drew back from Sir Richard and the master gunner, being no hard matter to dissuade men from death to life. The master gunner, finding himself and Sir Richard thus prevented and mastered by the greater number, would have slain himself with a sword, had he not been by force withheld and locked into his cabin. Then the general sent many boats aboard the Revenge, and divers of our men fearing Sir Richard’s disposition stole away aboard the general and other ships. Sir Richard, thus overmatched, was sent unto by Alfonso Baçan to remove out of the Revenge, the ship being marvelous unsavory, filled with blood and bodies

3. Hakluyt’s correction of Ralegh’s “15,000.”
of dead and wounded men like a slaughterhouse. Sir Richard answered that he might do with his body what he list, for he esteemed it not, and as he was carried out of the ship he swounded, and reviving again desired the company to pray for him. The general used Sir Richard with all humanity, and left nothing unattempted that tended to his recovery, highly commending his valor and worthiness, and greatly bewailing the danger wherein he was, being unto them a rare spectacle and a resolution seldom approved, to see one ship turn toward so many enemies, to endure the charge and boarding of so many huge armadas, and to resist and repel the assaults and entries of so many soldiers. All which and more is confirmed by a Spanish captain of the same armada, and a present actor in the fight, who being severed from the rest in a storm was by the *Lion* of London, a small ship, taken, and is now prisoner in London.

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To conclude, it hath ever to this day pleased God to prosper and defend her Majesty, to break the purposes of malicious enemies, of forsworn traitors, and of unjust practises and invasions. She hath ever been honored of the worthiest kings, served by faithful subjects, and shall by the favor of God resist, repel, and confound all whatsoever attempts against her sacred person or kingdom. In the meantime let the Spaniard and traitor vaunt of their success; and we her true and obedient vassals guided by the shining light of her virtues shall always love her, serve her, and obey her to the end of our lives.

1591

**Walsinghame**

“As you came from the holy land
of Walsinghame,
Met you not with my true love
by the way as you came?”

“How shall I know your true love,
that have met many one
As I went to the holy land,
that have come, that have gone?”

“She is neither white nor brown,
but as the heavens fair:
There is none hath a form so divine
in the earth or the air.”

“Such an one did I meet, good sir,
such an angelic face,
Who like a queen, like a nymph, did appear
by her gait, by her grace.”

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1. A priory popular for pilgrimages before its destruction in 1538. There were several traditional ballads on the subject; Raleigh’s imitation is a dialogue between an old man and a pilgrim. They speak alternately, until the last four stanzas, when the pilgrim speaks.
“She hath left me here all alone,
all alone as unknown,
Who sometimes did lead me with herself,
and me loved as her own.”

“What’s the cause that she leaves you alone
and a new way doth take,
Who loved you once as her own
and her joy did you make?”

“I have loved her all my youth,
but now, old, as you see;
Love likes not the falling fruit
from the withered tree.”

“Know that love is a careless child
and forgets promise past;
He is blind, he is deaf when he list
and in faith never fast.

“His desire is a dureless2 content
and a trustless joy;
He is won with a world of despair
and is lost with a toy.

“Of womenkind such indeed is the love,
(or the word ‘love’ abused)
Under which many childish desires
and conceits are excused.

“But Love is a durable fire
in the mind ever burning—
Never sick, never old, never dead,
from itself never turning.”

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2. Transient.