

SONS O' DEVON!

By PHILIP HARDY

*"The little Revenge ran on
Sheer into the heart of the foe."*
TENNYSON.

LORD THOMAS HOWARD climbed down the side of the *Revenge*, and into the pinnace which tossed alongside, and Sir Richard Grenville turned back from the bulwarks.

As he passed beneath one of the booms, a slim figure swung itself down and dropped lightly beside him.

"Why, Crispian, lad! Where hast thou been clambering?"

Crispian Grenville, second cousin to Sir Richard, was a boy of sixteen—a young man in those days—blue eyed, fair haired, and ready for every joke that came along. Just now, however, his eyes were alight with excitement, and he caught his cousin by the arm.

"There are ships on the horizon, Sir Richard—many ships! Dost thou suppose them to be Spaniards?"

"Ay, lad, they are Spaniards; the news was brought a moment before thou dropp'st upon me like a rotten apple from a bough."

Crispian gave a whoop of joy.

"Art prepared for the fight, cousin? Think'st thou there would be treasure?"

It was Crispian's first voyage, and so far it had been uneventful.

Sir Richard sighed.

"We shall have to show a clean pair of heels this time, my lad. There be fifty-three of the Dons, and we are but six. A third of my Lord Howard's men lie sick, and ninety of mine own. My lord flies and we follow."

"But the ninety Devon lads who lie ashore?"

Sir Richard patted his cousin on the shoulder.

"That's spoken like a Briton and a Grenville, Cris.' But have no fear, we do not move

till every sick man is safely stowed away on board.

"Give me three sailors, Sir Richard, and I'll have 'em safe in no time," cried Crispian; and Sir Richard let him have his way.

So Crispian toiled through the morning heat and the noonday haze, while Lord Howard vanished away into the mists with his five vessels, leaving the little *Revenge* smallest of all that gallant six—alone on the blue waters. And ever nearer crept the stately galleons, till the British sailors could see the glint of their gilded prows in the sun.

And at last the anchor was weighed and the tiny ship slid oceanwards.

Only a hundred seamen had Sir Richard to work the ship or to fight, if needs be—only a hundred hale men, and ninety lying sick in the hold. Yet as the *Revenge* drew nearer to the proud Spaniards, with their thousands of soldiers and sailors, the blood in Sir Richard's veins seethed with a mad desire to fight.

On the faces of his crew he read the same longing, the irrepressible British longing for a fight against odds. Suddenly Sir Richard Grenville laughed.

"Lads!" he cried, "we be good Devon men, and equal to all the Dons that ever cursed the seas. Up with the guns! We'll show our teeth ere we show our heels!"

A roaring cheer gave answer, led by the voice of Crispian himself, and in an instant the ship was alive with men who, swiftly and silently, obeyed their leader's commands.

The Spaniards came on, their great fleet divided into two sections, with a long, narrow lane of water between. Sir Richard gauged the width of that lane, and called his helmsman to his side.

"Canst thou steer through *that*?"

"Ay, your honour—and with room to spare!"

"Then do so!"

And the Spaniards, who had been wondering whether the tiny ship were worth the waste of a ball, gasped in sheer amazement as the *Revenge* swung round and came flying like a sea-bird into the very midst of them.

"She'll dash herself to pieces!" they cried: but the *Revenge* headed clear and clean for the narrow strip of water, headed for it, and entered it with the ease of a sword entering a scabbard.

And as she passed between the towering galleons, the Spanish soldiers looked down at her and laughed.

"A crazy Englishman!" they scoffed, "he is hardly worth destroying."

But from the British ship the guns awoke, and a yawning hole was torn in one of the gilded prows, so that the soldiers ceased to laugh, and the maimed galleon drew hastily out of range.

It had been Sir Richard's intention to run the gauntlet of the enemy's fire, and pass through the centre of the fleet and away. But the great *San Philip* sailed majestically across the narrow opening and the way was blocked.

"See—see, cousin!" cried Crispian, wild with excitement, and the thrill of the danger in which they stood. "They are going to fire upon us!"

"If they can!" laughed Sir Richard.

The Spanish guns thundered out, and tore away a portion of the little ship's rigging, but the shots never reached her deck—she was so small that the angle could not be reached by the death-dealing weapons with which the galleons bristled. Her very insignificance made her invincible.

"God save Queen Elizabeth! Fight on, lads!"

Crispian's young voice rang out blithely, and again the *Revenge* exacted her toll from the surrounding ships. The Spaniards cursed and looked down upon the active sailors and their leader—at the grizzled commander and the slim young boy who darted in and out amidst the men, and they wondered anew at the madness of the English.

But presently the Spanish officers decided upon another mode of attack. A volley from the soldiers' muskets broke over the *Revenge* and the gunner next to Crispian fell across his weapon, with a ragged wound in his head. The boy was on his knees beside him in an instant, but the poor fellow was past human aid, so Crispian laid him reverently down and, seizing the torch, fired the already loaded cannon. The ball crashed into a group of Spanish soldiers who were seeking to clamber down into the British ship, and the gunner was avenged. But more and more Spaniards poured forth from the galleons on to the impudent intruder, and the ninety-nine seamen were hard put to to drive them back.

Sir Richard, sword in hand, fought like a demon, and the enemy soldiers crossed themselves, believing that they fought Satan and his hosts. Close by his side was Crispian, his cheeks flushed and his eyes afire, and more than once it was his sword that cut down the Spaniard who else would have ended Sir Richard's story there and then.

No less gallantly fought the remaining seamen, and a dozen times the Spaniards sought to overwhelm the indomitable handful of Britishers, but always were they driven back over the bulwarks and into the sea.

The sunset came—and the night, yet still the battle waged—the strange, incredible battle of the one and the fifty-three! Crispian's young voice could be heard above the din, ever cheering on the men and shouting defiance at the foe.

"Men o' Bideford, show 'em how we do it down 'long Devon way! Into the sea with 'em. Hurrah for England! God save Elizabeth!"

Ship after ship drew alongside, discharged her unavailing cannon, and was driven back by the guns of her tiny, dauntless adversary. Ship after ship sent hosts of soldiers to board the *Revenge*, and saw them defeated by the handful of men, the boy and the mad Englishman.

When dawn shed her rosy light over the scene, fifty ships lay in a maimed condition round the one little British vessel, fearing to try their strength again lest more slaughter should be their reward. Yet the *Revenge* was harmless enough now. The powder spent, the pikes broken, and her masts lying



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ONE AGAINST FIFTY-THREE!

over her side in a tangle of rigging. Only from the end of that fallen mast the Cross of St. George fluttered in the morning breeze, as if in proud disdain of defeat.

"Fight on, fight on!" cried Sir Richard, urging his depleted handful to even greater efforts, and as he shouted a musket shot took him full in the breast.

Crispian's despairing cry rang over the waters, but there was no shout of triumph from the Spaniards. They looked at their enemy and were silent.

"Fight on, fight on!" gasped the dying man, raising himself in the boy's arms, and the battle surged on again.

But the British shaft was shot, and even British courage could not avail against overwhelming odds. Of that gallant hundred who had cheered their leader's daring scheme, only sixty remained alive, and a half of those sixty lay helpless on the crimson decks. Many a shot had pierced the hold, and many a sick man was cold and still—but in the powder magazine stood one more keg of powder.

Sir Richard Grenville looked at the wreck of his little ship, and at the scattered handful of men; the Spaniards had been once more beaten back and waited another chance to attack again.

"Lads, we've fought such a fight as history will ne'er forget," he cried, his voice ringing strong despite the wound which drained his life away. "Let us fall into the Hands of God, but not into the hands of the Inquisitors. Gunner, there is one more keg of powder; sink the ship and blow the Dons to atoms with us!"

He sank back exhausted, and the gunner

saluted. But the seamen shook their heads.

"We have children and wives who wait for us. We are not defeated, for the Dons are ready to hear conditions."

It was true. Weary of loss of life, the Spanish commander was crying to them to name their own conditions, and come aboard the flagship.

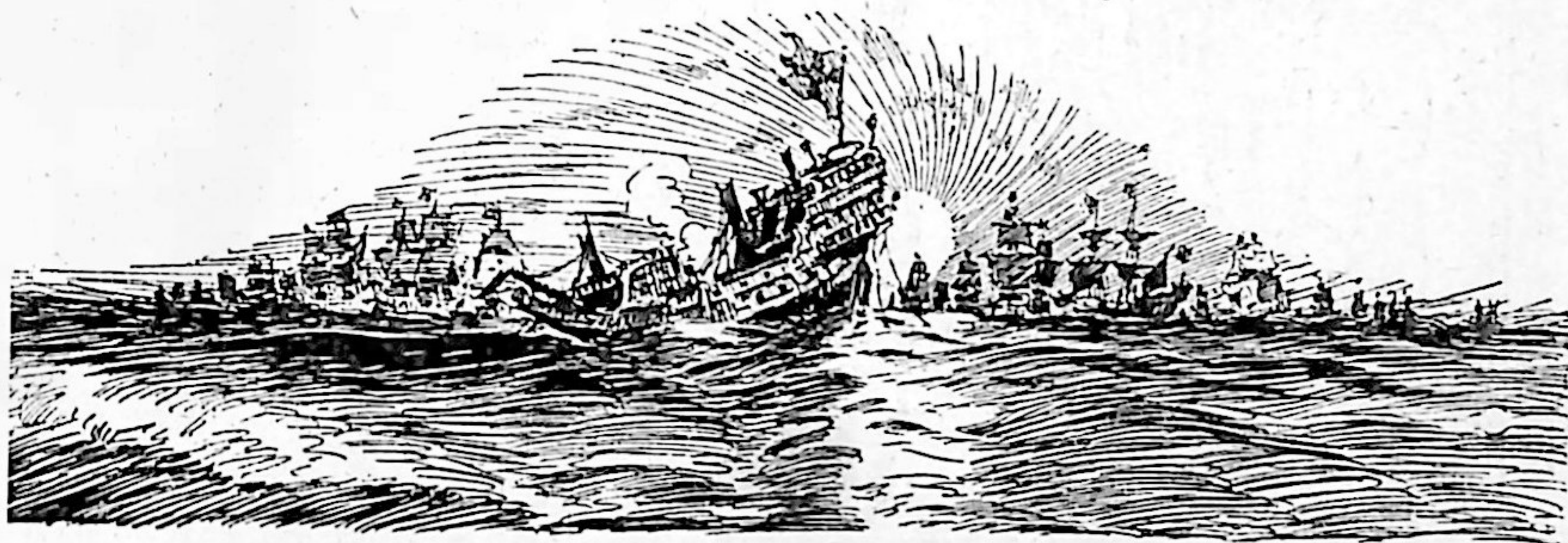
Sir Richard lay dying. Crispian was too overwhelmed with his grief to heed what went on around him, and the seamen yielded to the Spaniards' offer.

So they carried Sir Richard aboard the San Philip and the Spaniards bowed before him, praising him to his face for his courage. But the dying man staggered to his feet.

"Senors! Had I done less I should have been no Englishman and no son of Devon! I am a servant of my Queen, and I die in her cause. God save Elizabeth!"

He waved his broken sword over his head, and fell prone at the commander's feet.

Crispian flung himself down beside him, but the gallant gentleman had fought his last fight. And what a fight! The Spaniards looked down at him and marvelled. But they held to their promise, and so it came about that the little Revenge, with shattered masts and sadly rent cordage, returned to her native land, sailed by a swarthy crew, while Crispian received the treatment a prince might have envied, though his grief was too great for him to care what became of him just then. But he lived to fight many a fight for his Queen and his Faith, but never one so strange nor so gallant as the fight of the One and the Fifty-Three!



A Famous Character in Many Poses!

