

***JULIAN STAFFORD
CORBETT***



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English Men of Action.

CHAPTER I

DEVONSHIRE AND FOREIGN SERVICE

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In the middle of September, 1625, the great expedition by which Charles the First and Buckingham meant to revenge themselves upon the Spaniards for the ignominious failure of their escapade to Madrid was still choking Plymouth harbour with disorder and confusion. Impatient to renew the glories of Drake and Raleigh and Essex, the young King went down in person to hasten its departure. Great receptions were prepared for him at the principal points of his route, and bitter was the disappointment at Exeter that he was not to visit the city. For the plague was raging within its walls, and while holiday was kept everywhere else, the shadow of death was upon the ancient capital of the west.

Hardly, however, had the King passed them by when the citizens had a new excitement of their own. The noise of a quarrel broke in upon the gloom of the stricken city. Those within hearing ran to the spot and found a sight worth seeing. For there in the light of day, under the King's very nose, as it were, a stalwart young gentleman of about sixteen years of age was thrashing the under-sheriff of Devonshire within an inch of his life. With some difficulty, so furious was his assault, the lad was dragged off his victim before grievous bodily harm was done, and people began to inquire what it was all about.

Every one must have known young George Monk, who lived with his grandfather, Sir George Smith, at Heavytree,

close to Exeter. Sir George Smith of Maydford was a great Exeter magnate, and his grandson and godson George belonged to one of the best families in Devonshire, and was connected with half the rest; and had they known how the handsome boy was avenging the family honour in his own characteristic way, they would certainly have sympathised with him for the scrape he was in.

For the honour of the Monks of Potheridge in North Devon was a very serious thing. There for seventeen generations the family had lived. Ever since Henry the Third was King they had looked down from their high-perched manor-house over the lovely valley of the Torridge just where the river doubles upon itself in three majestic sweeps as though it were loath to leave a spot so beautiful. By dint of judicious marriages they had managed to be still prosperous and well connected. It was no secret indeed that they claimed royal blood by two descents on the distaff side. For the grandmother of George's father, Sir Thomas, was Frances Plantagenet, daughter and co-heiress of Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle; and his grandfather's grandmother, as co-heiress of Richard Champernown of Insworth, had brought him the Cornish bordure and kinship with King John through Richard, King of the Romans, and his son, the Earl of Cornwall.

But of late things had been going very hard at Potheridge. Sir Thomas had succeeded to a heavily encumbered estate, and his attempts at economy had done little or nothing to better his position. An increasing family added to his difficulties and his sorrows. Ten children had already been born to him, and four, including his two eldest

boys, were in the grave. Thomas was now the future heir, and then came George. After him was his favourite brother, the quiet studious Nicholas who was to be a parson; and then little Arthur the baby, who became a soldier like George. George had been born on December 8th, 1608, and was now nearly seventeen years old. He grew up a handsome lusty boy, and from his earliest years his daring and spirit had destined him to be a soldier. It was the career of all younger sons of metal, and few can have looked forward to it more ardently than George Monk. It was the tradition of his family. His uncle Richard had died a captain; his uncle Arthur had fallen in 1602 at the glorious defence of Ostend by that renowned captain, Sir Francis Vere. His great-uncle, Captain Francis Monk, had sailed with Drake and Norris in their famous descent upon Portugal in 1589, and having been severely wounded at the storm of Corunna, had died a few days afterwards when the fleet was driven by stress of weather into Peniché.

The very soil he trod was fertile with the romance of war. For George was born in the heart of the country which bred the greatest of the Elizabethan heroes. The soldiers and sailors who most adorned the great Queen's age were living memories in his childhood, their exploits were the tales of his nursery, their names the first words he learnt to lisp. Hard by lived his aunt Grace, who had married the brilliant young Bevil Grenville, heir and grandson of the immortal Sir Richard himself. His aunt Elizabeth was wife to Luttrell of Hartland Abbey, and through her he could claim kinship with the Howards; while all around the home by Tor and Torridge were clustered the old North Devon families with whom

Kingsley's undying romance has made us so familiar. Nor were these influences lessened as time went on. Sir George Smith took such a fancy to the fearless high-spirited boy that he one day offered to educate him if he might live half the year at Maydford. Poor embarrassed Sir Thomas could only consent, and George entered a new sphere of life even fuller of romance and adventure than the old. At Larkbere, within easy distance of his new home, lived Sir Nicholas Smith, Sir George's eldest son, where the lad found endless cousins to foster the dreams of Devon boyhood. But all his games and stories there were tame beside the attractions of his aunt Frances's house at Farringdon. For Frances Monk had married Sir Lewis Stukeley, Vice-Admiral of Devon, and there George must have found for a play-fellow little Tom Rolfe, the child of Pocahontas, whose guardian Stukeley had become since the Indian beauty's death. Sir Lewis, too, was a cousin and intimate friend of Raleigh himself, and George must have seen in the company of his uncle that latest born child of the sixteenth century and even heard his stirring adventures from his own lips. He would certainly have missed no opportunity of seeing the famous navigator. Raleigh was the hero of every lad with an English spirit or an ear for a tale. His *Discovery of Guiana* was a book that was in every one's hands, and George and his cousins must have known by heart its wonderful stories of El Dorado and the Amazons. At any rate the lad was old enough to have witnessed with eager eyes the setting forth of Sir Walter's last expedition to find the land of gold; to have heard with sinking heart how his uncle Stukeley had gone forth to arrest the hero upon his disastrous return; to mourn with all

England when Raleigh's head fell on Tower Hill, and to burn with shame and anger when he heard the cry of execration that rose against his uncle, the treacherous friend who betrayed the last of the Elizabethans.

It is not difficult to imagine how a boy of George's nature, brought up in the midst of such surroundings, must have chafed to see his friends and kinsmen joining their colours while he was too young to be allowed to go. Richard Grenville, Sir Bevil's brother, whom George must have known well, was with the expedition, and George can have wished nothing better than to serve under him. Sir Richard Grenville, though he afterwards disgraced himself by his excesses in the Civil War, was then the very hero for a boy like George. He was a typical Low Country soldier. From an early age he had served with Prince Maurice, the first captain of his time, in the regiment of that pattern soldier Lord Vere. In a few years he had risen to the rank of captain, and was now commanding a company in the regiment of Sir John Borough, chief of the staff to the expedition. It was a splendid opportunity for George to begin his career, but it was not to be, and it must have been with mixed feelings that he heard the expedition was not to be delayed a year.

When the King came down it was of course impossible that a man of such a position as Sir Thomas Monk should not go and pay him his respects like the other county gentlemen. Unfortunately there was an annoying difficulty in the way. He was by this time hopelessly in debt, and so many judgments were out against him that he was little better than a prisoner at Potheridge. To appear in public meant certain arrest. There was but one escape from the

dilemma, and that was to bribe the under-sheriff. The only question was to whom so delicate a mission was to be entrusted, and it cannot but raise our opinion of young George that he was chosen for the task. His mission was successfully carried out, and in due course Sir Thomas rode out to meet his sovereign with all the best blood in Devon. But before the royal party came in sight the proceedings were interrupted by a painful incident. Either the under-sheriff had blabbed, or George had been boasting of his diplomacy. At all events the rascally attorney had received a bigger bribe from the other side, and now at this solemn moment and in face of the whole county the villain came forward and arrested Sir Thomas.

George Monk was not a boy to sit down quietly under such an indignity. Without saying anything to anybody he took the first opportunity of slipping off into Exeter regardless of the plague. Once inside the gates he went straight to the perfidious attorney, and having told him in the plainest words what he thought of him, there and then proceeded to administer the cudgelling in the midst of which he has been already introduced, and which was to prove his introduction to an eventful career.

For George was in a desperate scrape. The bruised lawyer threatened merciless proceedings, and to cudgel an under-sheriff was an outrage of which the law was likely to take a very serious view. It was clear that the boy must be concealed till the storm blew over. There was only one way of doing it. The fleet was lying in Plymouth nearly ready to sail. Once there he would be safe. So George, to his intense delight we may be sure, was smuggled off and hurriedly

engaged as a volunteer under his kinsman Sir Richard Grenville. Early in October the expedition sailed. The baffled attorney had to hang up his unserved writ on the office-files, and George Monk, by the force of the straitened circumstances of the family, found himself prematurely a soldier with the burden of an imperfect education to carry through life.

It is unnecessary to follow closely the disastrous expedition to Cadiz in 1625. Ill-planned, ill-disciplined, ill-officered, and ill-supplied, it was doomed from the first to failure. For young George Monk it was a bitter awakening from the dreams a boy will have of the glories of a soldier's life. The ship in which he sailed and the company in which he served, bad as it was, can hardly have been so bad as the rest. Grenville was at least a soldier by profession and a good officer. Borough's regiment must at least have tasted discipline. The veteran general was one of the most distinguished and scholarly soldiers of his time; a man who had seen grow up under the Veres that immortal English brigade which by patient effort and undaunted perseverance had wrested from the Spaniards their till then unchallenged claim to be the finest infantry in the world. He had seen more service than any man in the army, and in all questions of military science his word was law.

Thus George began his career under good masters, and two years later he was fortunate enough to bring himself again under their command. At the head of another expedition, as ill-found as the first, Buckingham early in June, 1627, effected a landing on the Isle of Rhé, and laid siege to St. Martin, the citadel of the island. Its capture

proved a more difficult matter than he had expected. Already nearly a fortnight had been expended in fruitless attempts when Buckingham's anxieties were further increased by unwelcome news. A young gentleman was announced with an important verbal message from the lips of the King. It was George Monk, who at the risk of his life had made his way through France; though ignorant of the language he had penetrated the army which lay before Rochelle, and so reached Rhé with the intelligence that a large combined naval and military force was being prepared in France to relieve the island.

For this daring service, the risks of which it is difficult to exaggerate, Sir John Borough gave him a commission as ensign in his own regiment, of which Sir Richard Grenville was major, or sergeant-major, as the rank then was, a rank involving all the duties which are now performed by adjutants, as well as the command of a company. It was most probably his kinsman's colours that the young ensign carried, and this is why he always regarded Sir Richard as his father-in-arms. For now he had begun in earnest his career as a professional soldier, and it was with every opportunity of laying the foundations of that consummate technical knowledge which afterwards distinguished him. To enforce the sound teaching of his colonel came the appalling disaster with which the expedition closed. It was a lesson he never forgot, and long after he would often grieve over the iniquitous mismanagement with which the whole affair had been conducted.

In the following year he took part with his regiment, which was now commanded by Grenville, in the last half-

hearted attempt to relieve Rochelle, and then followed a period of inactivity. Buckingham was dead, and Conway with his policy of non-intervention reigned in his stead. Richelieu had no desire to retaliate; Spain was too weak to strike a blow, and England settled down to enjoy her repose. At home there was no chance of employment for the professional soldier for many years to come, and adventurous youth must look abroad.

There over the sea was a tempting prospect. Frederick Henry, the young Prince of Orange, had begun his brilliant career. In the previous year he had suddenly taken the offensive and snatched Grol from the very arms of the great Spinola. His treasury was overflowing with the plunder of the plate-fleet which Peter Hein had captured, and now he was besieging Bois-le-duc. Lord Vere had returned at his summons to command the English brigade and to give the young Stadtholder the benefit of his unrivalled experience. It was a name to conjure with, and volunteers flocked over from England eager for the reputation of having served under the most accomplished soldier England had yet produced. But amateur soldiering would not now satisfy George Monk, nor would his purse bear the expenses which a gentleman-private must incur. Fortunately he was not without interest, and was able to procure a commission in the regiment of which Lord Vere's kinsman, the young Earl of Oxford, had just obtained the command.

Before he could join Bois-le-duc had fallen, and it was not till 1631 that the Stadtholder took the field again. This year, however, saw the annihilation of the Spanish flotilla which attempted to surprise the island of Tholen. Lord Oxford had

command of the English contingent, which was detailed to man the prince's boats, and at last George tasted the sweets of victory. The following year he was to witness one of the most brilliant campaigns which had ever been fought in the Low Countries. No sooner was the prince in motion than Venlo, Stralen, Ruremonde fell in rapid succession, and by the middle of June he had completely invested Maastricht. Three armies flew to its relief, but the prince beat them all, and at last was left to prosecute the siege unmolested. The brunt of the work in the English lines fell on Monk's regiment, but the young ensign passed through the four months of almost daily fighting without a scratch. His colonel was not so fortunate. The earl was shot dead in the second month of the siege while bringing up reinforcements to the support of the advanced picket in the trenches. On August 21st Maastricht capitulated, and the campaign was brought to a glorious conclusion. Lord Vere returned to England, having assigned the command of his regiment to George Goring, the eldest son of Lord Norwich and the future notorious cavalry officer of the Civil Wars.

It was about this time that Monk was promoted to the rank of captain, and found himself in a position which laid the foundations of his fortunes. He was in command of the colonel's company, that is to say, a double company, of which the colonel was nominal captain. For in the early days of the regimental system every colonel had his company just as every general had his regiment; and as the general had his lieutenant-colonel, so each colonel had his captain-lieutenant taking precedence of all the other captains. It was this rank that Monk now bore, and it was one to which

great honour and responsibility were attached. It was in the colonel's company that the volunteers chiefly chose to trail their pikes, and so great was the prestige of Lord Vere's regiment, and so popular the fascinating reprobate who commanded it, that his company was sometimes half composed of unruly young gentlemen who had come abroad to see the wars and sow their wild oats. Thus it was that Monk became personally acquainted with half the officers who afterwards distinguished themselves in the coming Civil Wars, and not only did he make their acquaintance but he won their respect as well. It was only by enforcing the strictest discipline that order could be maintained amongst such a company. Monk took his profession seriously. During his service in Holland he had made deep study of the military sciences, no doubt in company with old Henry Hexham, the learned and literary quartermaster of the regiment. He had no idea of young gentlemen playing at soldiers and disgracing the name by using it only as an excuse for every kind of licence. Soldiering under Captain Monk was found to be a very serious thing. The wildest blades were soon tamed by the impassive stare and rough speech of the captain-lieutenant, young as he still was, and many there were who lived to thank him long afterwards for the severity of the lessons he taught.

Yet he was no mere soldier of the lecture-room and parade-ground either, for all his science and severity. Those who followed George Monk had to tread in thorny places, as any one who knew it not before found out at the siege of Breda. It was the last piece of service for Monk in the Low Countries, and it was the one in which he crowned his

reputation for that absolute intrepidity which afterwards used to terrify the carpet-knights of the Restoration, and even make Prince Rupert hold his breath.

In 1637 Frederick found himself strong enough to invest the town with a combined army of Dutch and French, together with his English brigade. The French and English attacks were directed on an important hornwork, and here Goring's regiment had plenty of hard work and hard fighting. Monk soon found himself without a colonel; for Goring here received the wound that gave him the attractive limp the young cavaliers used afterwards so to envy, and he had to give up the active command of his regiment. But in spite of every difficulty, by the night of September 6th the English mines were almost ready. On the morrow they were to be reported complete. Monk was in command of the advanced picket in the trenches. Some attempt of the besieged to destroy the English works was only to be expected, and but for Monk's vigilance the labour of weeks might have been undone in a single night. In discharge of his duty as commander in the trenches he was making the round, and at one point he had to pass close under the hornwork. No sooner had he reached the spot than he saw a number of Spaniards dropping silently from the berme into the trenches. He had but four pikes and a couple of musketeers at his back, but without a moment's hesitation he hurled himself at the dark mass in front of him. A desperate hand-to-hand struggle ensued, till the picket, alarmed by the firing, came up, and the enemy were driven within their own works.

The mines were saved, and next morning were reported ready to be sprung. The prince at once ordered the English and French to assault, and Monk himself was told off to lead a forlorn hope of twenty musketeers and ten pikes. In support were a few sappers and two small parties like his own to right and left. After them were the whole of the gentlemen-volunteers. When all was ready the mines were discharged. A great piece of the work crumbled into ruins, and Monk, followed by his party, disappeared into the cloud of dust and smoke before it had time to settle. Without a check he reached the summit of the breach and leaped out upon a body of musketeers drawn up to resist the stormers. Completely surprised by the fury and suddenness of Monk's attack, the Spaniards broke and fled as he sprang out of the smoke. Regardless of his followers, half of whom slunk back into the breach, Monk kept on right into the enemies' work and dashed straight at a body of some six or seven score men who stood with pikes charged to receive him. But nothing would stop him now. Shouting at the top of his voice, "A Goring! a Goring!" he fell furiously on them with the handful who had followed. Fortunately the supports were close at his heels, and shaken by his desperate onslaught, the Spaniards broke before the charge of the volunteers. In disorder they fled into an interior work followed by the English and French, who rushed bravely to the rescue, and the hornwork was won.¹

It was the beginning of the end. The loss of the hornwork made the city untenable, and a few weeks later the garrison surrendered. It was Monk's last stroke in the service of the States-General. In the following year, as he lay in winter-

quarters at Dort, the burghers took deep offence at some disturbances of which his young reprobates had been guilty, and claimed to try them for the offence. No one had a higher sense of his duty to his employers than Monk, and no one stood up more stoutly for the rights of the men under his command. He insisted on settling the matter by court-martial. The burghers appealed to the States. Such cases were not unknown, and had always been decided in favour of the military. But Dort was an important town, and not to be offended lightly. The States-General decided in favour of the burgomaster, and the prince had to order Monk and his troops into quarters which were by no means a change for the better. Monk was highly offended. He considered the honour of the army was outraged in his person. Unable to support the indignity, and disgusted at the want of consideration shown to a man of his services, he resigned his commission, and resolved to place his sword and experience at the service of his own country.

CHAPTER II

FOR KING AND PARLIAMENT

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The great drama was about to begin. The star-chamber had given judgment in Hampden's case: the prayer-book had been read in Edinburgh; and it was amidst ominous mutterings of coming evil that Captain Monk set foot once more upon his native shore.

How great a tragedy was to develop itself out of the prologue upon which the curtain was about to rise, no one as yet could tell. Still less were there any to guess that the plain Low Country officer stepping on to the Dover beach was the man who was to cut the knot of the last act and end the play in a blaze of triumph.

We can see him clearly as he rides towards London, brooding, as his manner was, on the ungrateful treatment he had received at the hands of his masters. He is now in his thirtieth year, rather short than tall, but thickset and in full possession of the physical strength which the ill-starred under-sheriff had tasted at Exeter years ago; and as with an air of dogged self-reliance he sits erect upon his horse, handsome, fresh-coloured, well-knit, he looks every inch a soldier. Quietly chewing his tobacco for company, as the fashion was, he speaks little to those who overtake him on the road, except perhaps it is to grumble at the Mynheers when the subject turns that way. He answers strangers with a blunt, almost rude brevity, at which men are offended, but which somehow they feel little inclined to openly resent. He

is an ill-mannered, thick-headed soldier, they say, and it is best to leave him alone to take his own way.

And indeed he was little more. He was frankly the ideal of a soldier of fortune, versed in his art to the point of pedantry, wary to the verge of craftiness, fearless to a fault, jealous of his honour as the knight of La Mancha himself. The name by which such men were known is unfortunate, for it has led to much misconception of their character. Then it was well understood to mean a soldier by profession, no more nor less than what every officer in our army is to-day. The ideal soldier of fortune was marked not so much by his readiness to change his colours as by his blind devotion to those with which for the time being he was engaged. Until the period of his commission, or of the war or campaign for which he had engaged was ended, his loyalty to his paymasters was as ungrudging as it was unassailable. Nothing would have induced him to enter a service which he considered dishonourable, but having once engaged he fought and toiled and bled in contemptuous indifference to the political manœuvres of the men whose commission he held. To look upon such men as cruel, unprincipled adventurers is the very reverse of the truth where worthy pupils of the heroic Veres are concerned. We must remember that it was in their school that Monk learnt his trade, and not in that which produced men like the Turners and Dalziells and brought disgrace upon the name of the soldier of fortune. They were men who could only teach virtues, though perhaps the only virtues they could teach were honesty and obedience. At any rate that was the lesson which Monk learnt. To be true to his paymaster, that

was his rule in life; to obey the civil authority which employed him, that was his political creed. Such was the code which Monk brought home with him from the Low Countries. Simple and rude as it was, it was all he had to guide him through the labyrinth he was about to tread.

As yet the Revolution stirred but in restless slumber, and it is probable that it was not the prospect of civil strife which brought Monk to England in search of employment. Prince Rupert and his brother were at Court in hopes of getting their uncle's aid for the recovery of the Palatinate; and the King, sobered by failure, was turning and doubling every way to shirk the responsibility and enjoy the credit of assisting his beautiful and unfortunate sister. Of all the schemes which were suggested to this end the most extraordinary was the project for the colonisation of Madagascar. The idea was that a thousand gentlemen should join, each with a thousand pounds and a number of servants. The King was to provide twelve ships from the navy, and thirty merchantmen were to complete the fleet. Every adventurer was to sail in person, and the whole was to be commanded by Prince Rupert himself, with the title of Governor-General of Madagascar or St. Lawrence. But Elizabeth grew anxious about her son, and opposed the wild scheme in which she could see no reason. "As for Rupert's romance," she wrote to Roe, "about Madagascar, it sounds more like one of Don Quixote's conquests when he promised his trusty squire to make him king of an island." In the end practical merchants and seamen threw so much cold water on the scheme that it began to lose favour, and Rupert did not go.

Meanwhile all the world was run mad on the romantic adventure. Davenant wrote a little epic about it, which made Endymion Porter exclaim, himself as mad as the rest:

"What lofty fancy was't possess your brain,
And caus'd you soare into so high a straine?"

Suckling so far forgot himself in the craze of the hour as to write a copy of verses that may still be read without a blush. Even the phlegmatic Captain Monk was carried away. Man of the new time as he was, in the bottom of his heart he was Elizabethan. The project was more than enough to revive the dreams of his Devonshire boyhood, of Raleigh, of Guiana, and the early days of Virginia, and he promised to go. But it was not to be. Ere long he withdrew, either because his native shrewdness showed him it was all a bubble or else because the curtain was up at last, and he turned to the thrilling play beside which the Madagascar adventure was only a childish fairy tale.

Scotland was to be coerced into conformity, and in the bustle of preparation Monk saw his chance. To every soldier in England his name must have been perfectly familiar. Every young gentleman who had seen any service was hurrying to the King's standard on the chance of a commission, and the majority of them would be only too glad to claim George Monk as their father-in-arms, and boast of their service in the colonel's company of the crack regiment in the Low Country Brigade.

Nor did Monk lack powerful friends. He was a wide-kinned man, so wide that it is impossible to trace the multitudinous ramifications of his family. He had connections in high

places, and they began to take him up. Above all Lord Leicester seems to have found a pleasure in pushing his distinguished young kinsman's fortunes, and at this moment there was no better friend a young man could have than Robert Sidney, second Earl of Leicester. His family was just now rising into high favour. His brother-in-law, the Earl of Northumberland, was Lord Admiral, while for sister-in-law he could claim the lovely Countess of Carlisle herself.

This "Erinnys of the North," as Warburton called her, for whom Waller could forget awhile his Sacharissa, who made Davenant sing his sweetest, and wrung from Suckling his most lascivious note, was still the reigning beauty of the Court. As she entered middle age her charms seemed only to ripen. Her eyes were as bright, her wit as keen, her vivacity as sparkling as ever. The only change was in the field of her conquests. Weary of breaking the hearts of fops and poets, she was seeking new excitement in political intrigue and new pleasures in charming tried leaders of men such as Pym and Strafford. At this moment a blunt manly soldier like Captain Monk was just the man to find favour in her capricious eyes. Monk was always soft-hearted with a woman, and his admiration of such a beauty must have been frank and undisguised. Whatever was the cause, he found her willing to support Lord Leicester's request for his advancement. The task was not difficult. Officers of tried worth who could be trusted in the quarrel were in high demand for lieutenant-colonels of the newly-raised regiments. Half the colonels were noblemen of little experience, and the rest were occupied with their duties on the staff. Monk, as a man who despised politics and was