

ROBERT BLAKE, the famous *General-at-sea*, as he and other great leaders in Commonwealth times were called, is *the* great Hero of Bridgwater. So much so that, if the old *Bridge of Walter* were ever to be re-christened, it would be called *The Bridge of Blake*, the true eponymous hero. For, if it be necessary to cast up accounts, Robert Blake did more for the lasting fame of Bridgwater than the Domesday Walter de Douai or the great Baron William Briwere, the author of so many of its original privileges and ancient endowments. The bridge and the shipping and the restless ebb and flow of the tidal Parret itself call up the picture of that bold and ever active seaman, one of a great family and clan, whose outlook was down those long muddy reaches, past its little landing-places, creeks, and *pills* to Bridgwater Bay, to the Severn Sea, and thence in the *crescendo* scale of enterprise to lands washed in the Occident and Orient by the mighty Ocean itself. The seeds of enterprise, like the famous *coco de mer* itself in the Seychelles, were carried down the Parret and deposited on far distant shores almost, it would seem, by random agencies and by cross currents. Unless, indeed, we discern in such masterful minds and such indomitable perseverance as that displayed by our West-Country mariners, the purposeful intentions and fixed ideas of men now recognizing for the first time the new destiny of a free and awakened England, and the trumpet-call to fame. Surely the call came not only from the *mare clausum* of Selden and the narrow seas around England's cliffs, but from *oceanus circumvagus*, a wider sphere and a more mighty heritage. And so Blake and his compeers fought for the honour of the flag not only with the Dutch along the North Seas and the Dogger Bank, but with the Algerine ships of North Africa, the French in the Mediterranean, and with the Spanish in the Canaries and the West Indies and, indeed, wherever they could meet them. Their wonderful maritime and naval activity was a contemporary feature of the Commonwealth, and Robert Blake was, first and foremost, the head figure of it. It was the day of small things, as far as comparisons with modern developments are concerned, and both Bridgwater, Bristol and the rest of the Severn ports seem muddy creeks and ditches, but in the seventeenth century the Avon and the Parret could find a berth for stout British-built vessels manned by hardy sailors (every one of them a trained man), who served the occasion well when the first blows of the

great naval duels had to be dealt.

Robert Blake's father, Humphrey, was a merchant of Bridgwater of great note, and had amassed by trade £8000, a large sum in those days, and he had amassed it chiefly by trading with Spanish ports. This Spanish connection is worth noticing as it meant much to the Blake family, not only so far as trade was concerned, but because of certain influences which its members imbibed from a first-hand knowledge of Spain and of Spanish ways. It is said that the first news of the sailing of the Invincible Armada from Spain to England was brought by a Bridgwater ship belonging to Humphrey Blake.\* Far back in the centuries Bridgwater was often a starting-place for a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James of Compostella. Robert Blake made it the starting-place of a new kind of pilgrimage altogether, not wholly consonant with the old.

St. Mary's Church, with its historic parapets and far-reaching steeple dominating Sedgemoor and all the lowlands round, was the church where at the old font, still surviving, Robert Blake received his Christian name, and the baptismal entry is there for all to see.

It is said that the infant was carried to the mother church from a little house of a somewhat dark and dingy appearance in Blake Street, where certain ancient features are still pointed out. It seems clear enough that this house really had the honour of first sheltering one of the greatest of England's naval heroes.

Blake's christening robe, described as a very handsome one of coloured silk, edged with silver filigree, as well as his christening cap, of silk and velvet, are in the possession of his descendants, the Ruddock family, a name that figures amongst the recent mayors of Bridgwater. As a boy Robert Blake received the first rudiments of his education at King James's Grammar School in Bridgwater, an institution of good repute in its day. It has long since disappeared, but, by a curious coincidence, was replaced by another school of similar aims which was conducted in the house in which the Admiral was born (Jarman's *Bridgwater*, p. 64). Being fond of books young Blake looked to Oxford and, at the age of sixteen, went to St. Alban's Hall. Here he tried for a Christ Church scholarship, but failing in this attempt he shifted his abode from St. Alban's Hall to Wadham College, an institution just founded

by Nicholas and Dorothy Wadham, Somerset benefactors living at Merrifield near Ilton and friends of Robert Blake's father.

Few details are known of Blake's undergraduate days, and one old story goes that in his frolicsome mood he was *addicted to stealing swans*, but if such were ever the case the permanent result upon his understanding and character was not worse than that left upon the great Shakespeare by his inroads upon Sir Thomas Lucy's deer park.

Robert Blake made an unusually long stay at Oxford, remaining there nine years. This was chiefly owing to his great love of the classics, which in his case seemed to work the best results and to show how true may be the maxim of the Oxford schools: *Emollit mores, nee sinit esse ferus*. We are told that *he intended to put himself on some Faculty line for a profession, rather for the increase of knowledge than of fortune.* The ambition of being a quiet man of academical research comes to us as a revelation and perhaps betrays by a flash one of the deepest springs in Blake's nature. That he would try to increase the world of knowledge without increasing his own fortune we can well believe, for the trend of Blake's life was to amass glory and riches for his country but to gain little for himself personally. However, he showed his bent for the classics by writing in 1623 a copy of verses on the death of the great antiquary Camden, a feat which argues a strong sympathy with England's history and archaeology. Throughout his life Blake kept up his classics, and gave point to his occasional pleasantries by quoting Latin phrases and introducing apt sayings from the classics which he knew *ad unguem*.

From Oxford Robert Blake was summoned back to Bridgwater by the death of his father (1625). Towards the end of his life affairs had not prospered with Humphrey Blake, and it was rather a heavy burden that he bequeathed to his son, to look after the future of a large family which originally numbered fourteen, of which twelve were sons. Humphrey Blake's failures may have come from bad debts or through the fluctuations and uncertainties of Spanish trade. Or it might have been owing to the pirates that swarmed everywhere, from whom there was no protection at that date.

Here is a significant letter from the Commonwealth Admiral the Earl of Warwick to John Pym living at Cannington (*Bouverie Papers*, Hist. MSS. Commission).

*A bark of Blakeney in Norfolk has told me that divers Irish pirates are abroad well manned, and that they have taken a Yarmouth man and hanged all the English and their dogs also. None escaped but a French pilot of S. Malo. They lie about Ushant, Conquet Road, Belle Isle, Croisie and Nantes. If they be not prevented they will take many of our merchantmen who have no defences."* This disgraceful state of things lasted till Robert Blake took up the whole question of piracy and settled it.

Robert Blake has been described by one who was bred in the family as a man of about five feet six inches in height and a little inclined to corpulence, *of a fresh sanguine complexion, his hair of the frizzled kind, as was then the mode. He wore whiskers (moustaches) which he curled when he was anyways provoked. He was commonly very plain in his dress, but when he was abroad and appeared as General he was always dressed as became his rank, with a reserve of moderation."* In a word, he was a plain stalwart Englishman without pretence or ceremony when ceremony was out of place, a far different character from the more picturesque cavalier, but a more terrible foe to meet. Place one of Goring's rascally troopers alongside of Robert Blake and you have the contrasts of the age illustrated as in two portraits. Like other born leaders of men by sea and land Robert Blake proved that it was not by the standard of his inches but rather by his bold and unquenchable spirit that he was to be measured. When at Oxford in 1619 Blake stood for a fellowship at Merton College, and the only reason why Sir Henry Saville, the warden of the college, objected to him was that he was not quite tall enough. It happened well for his country that Robert Blake was *ploughed* on this score for the Merton fellowship. The vigour of that manhood and versatile talent that displayed itself in the sieges of Lyme and Taunton, fought the Dutch for the mastery of the seas, humbled to the dust the Saltee rovers, forced the harbour of Santa Cruz at Teneriffe, where even Nelson failed — might have withered away in the monotonous and colourless round of an Oxford tutor and don.

In addition to the town of Bridgwater there were three places in the neighbourhood with which Robert Blake and his family were closely associated, namely, Planesfeld or Plainsfield Court in Over Stowey parish under the Quantock Hills; Knowle manor in Puriton parish at the foot of the Polden Hills; and Tuxwell manor in Spaxton parish. Of

these places Tuxwell, or Tocheswelle, as it was anciently written, seems to have been the first manor which the Blake family held. In Queen Mary's reign Tuxwell was in the possession of George Sydenham, a member, probably, of that family which took its name from Sydenham close to Bridgwater and was represented by so many branches at Stogumber, Dulverton, and elsewhere. In Elizabethan days the Sydenhams figure prominently in the muster rolls of local levies ready to fight against Spain. From a manuscript in the possession formerly of Humphrey Sydenham we are told that George Sydenham had licence to alienate the manor of Tuxwell to Humphrey Blake in 1555. Far back in the history of Bridgwater there was a certain William Blaccke who, in 1380, together with many others, laid violent hands upon certain Papal Bulls belonging to St. John's Hospital, and possibly this Blaccke may have been an ancestor.

Tuxwell, however, as a kind of *incunabula gentis*, claims more than a passing attention. It is a quiet retired farm-house close to a moorish bit of ground called Radlet (Radeflot) Common, and together with a place called *le morland* belonged formerly to the Duchy of Lancaster. In 1550 a rent resolute was paid to the Duke of Somerset as of his manor of Tuxwell. It is difficult now to guess the original size of the manor, but in 1829, when Tuxwell farm was sold by the trustees of Lord Egmont to Henry Labouchere, Lord Taunton, it consisted of 329 a. 3 r. 25 p. and had a "Blake's orchard" and a "*Blake's Eight Acres*," keeping alive the name of the original owners. Inside the house — now completely modernized — are a few old oak beams across a parlour, and underneath the room itself is said to be a well, probably the well which attracted the first settler to Tuxwell. Quiet and remote as the little Quantock village of Spaxton now seems to be, nestling in a peaceful landscape, it used to boast of stirring memories in Elizabethan days. Here was the home of the Elizabethan admiral. Sir Robert Crosse, whose exploits in helping to capture the *Madre di Dios*, as commander of the *Foresight* in 1592, must have been handed down to young Robert Blake and bruited abroad over the whole of Quantock land as well as Bridgwater. The tale of the capture reads like a romance. Sir R. Crosse's share of the plunder was £2000 no inconsiderable sum in those days. Of spices alone the *Madre di Dios* had, at her sailing, no less than 537 tons and of ebony

wood 15 tons. The tapestries, silk stuffs and satins of the rich carrack were worth a king's ransom. The gentry and merchants of the West-Country were fired by constant tales of ocean adventure and enterprise. Had not one of the Palmer family of Fairfield near Stoke Courcy accompanied the famous Sir Francis Drake round the world? Many of the old Somerset manor-houses such as Dodington Hall, Fairfield, Nether Stowey and others were re-edified and enlarged by their owners about 1580 as if the times were good and Spanish doubloons were enlarging their revenues.

The acquisition of one piece of landed property very often leads on to another, either by purchase or by marriage. Close to Tuxwell, just outside the boundaries of Spaxton parish and within Over Stowey, lies the manor of Plainsfield Court, apparently a more important manor than Tuxwell. In the Over Stowey tithe map Plainsfield figures as a separate section of the parish, and has separate entries of its arable ground, woods and pastures. In 1829 the manor is described as lying partly in Spaxton as well, with an acreage of 274a. 1r. 9p., Plainsfield Park covering 35a. 2r. 26p. Humphrey Blake, the Admiral's father, married the heiress of this adjoining property, Sara Williams, of a knightly family that had been already settled at Plainsfield for a hundred years. There is good authority for saying that Plainsfield Court was the dower of Sara Williams, and that it had been granted first to Sir John Williams by Henry VII, descending from him in turn to Reginald Williams, John Williams and Nicholas Williams. In the *Herald's Visitation of Somerset*, 1623, the Admiral's father is styled Humphrey Blake of Plainsfield, son of Robert Blake of Bridgwater.

As at Tuxwell, so at Plainsfield the name of Blake has been preserved in a field-name, viz. Blake's Close Orchard, 3a. 1r. 0p., and in one of the lower rooms of Plainsfield Court itself there is still to be seen a plaster moulding or panel, seven feet long and two wide, with the arms of the Blake family, a chevron between three garbs, dated 1663, and with the initials E.B. in the centre of the foliation. The influence of the Blake family was great at this time in the Quantock villages of Over Stowey, Spaxton, and Aisholt, and in course of time there were many ramifications of the clan elsewhere, for they were a prolific set. They became allied

with the Perry family at Halse, the Sealy family of Bridgwater, the Crosse family of Blackmore in Spaxton, the Selleck family of Over Stowey, the Upton family of Fitzhead, and so on. The old biographer of the Admiral, who had been bred in the family, writes thus : *There is at Padknoller [Charlynch] a family of the same name and of the same blood as I was assured on the spot, but when I desired further satisfaction concerning it of the master of the family, he, to my very great surprise, seemed willing enough to shuffle off any relation to Admiral Blake, on account of his being a Puritan and a Commonwealth's man, that person being an utter enemy to the principles both of one and the other. And, to show how whimsical Party is, there is a family of the Blakes, about twelve miles from thence, who have lived long in the profession of those [Puritan and Commonwealth] principles, and who cannot make out any relation in blood to Admiral Blake's family.*" It may be noted as a wholesome sign of the times that there is now a laudable, if not a feverish, anxiety, not only on the part of the Padnoller branch, but also of all others descended from the Blake stem, to claim affinity with the great Admiral, and their name is legion. If the clan be really devoted to this hero-worship, it is clear that they can not only satisfy a legitimate pride when the family connection is established, but that they can learn much from their hero in whatever sphere of action he was engaged. More especially is this the case because Robert Blake stands for character rather than state honours. Yet upon whom could the title of the *Earl of Bridgwater* have rested better than with Robert Blake ? This title lay in Blake's time (1617) with John Egerton, of no local fame or associations.

There is an interesting and hitherto unpublished account of a certain lawsuit, in 1637-8, between Humphrey Blake, the Admiral's brother apparently, and Algernon Earl of Northumberland, lord of the manor of Wick-Fitzpayne, in Stoke Courcy, and owner of portion of Over Stowey on the Quantocks. This Algernon was, it may be noted, Lord High Admiral of King Charles the First at that date. The subject of dispute was a right of common on the Quantock Hills. Humphrey Blake, as owner of Plainsfield, claimed pasture on the hills *by reason of vicinage upon the said (vastum) waste of Quantocke*. Blake is the defendant, and it is shown that he is " *lawfully seised in his demesne of fee or fee-tail of the capital messuage, barton, farm and manor of Planesfield bordering upon the said waste of Quantocke held of His Majesty as of*

*his manor of Hampton Court by knight's service.*" Humphrey Blake and his ancestors before him from time immemorial, so the pleading runs, had always enjoyed common of pasture on Quantock Waste for all their cattle, except when any part of the hill was tilled or sown with rye or corn. Such, we may presume, had been the privilege of the Williams family before the Blakes inherited Plainsfield. The depositions of witnesses taken at Glastonbury, 19th December, 1637, before William Coward, are interesting as throwing a sidelight upon the Quantocks. One of the witnesses had known Humphrey Blake personally for six years, and had always heard that *the common called Quantock and reputed to be parcel of the manor of Wick-Fitzpayne contained about 1200 acres*. The matter ended by Humphrey Blake having 120 acres of land set out for him from the common of Quantock on Plainsfield Hill (July, 1639), and the wood survives to this day.

The Quantock traditions, therefore, were strong in the Blake family, and there could have been no property more prized by these merchants of Bridgwater than this. The very transference of the manor is symbolical of the change going on in England. Originally it had formed part of the great Stowey Barony, held up to the reign of Henry VII by the Audley family, and the barony marched with the still greater Stoke Courcy Barony, both of them claiming part of the great Quantock Common or Waste. Nether Stowey Barony claimed 1000 acres with pasturage for 1000 sheep, and the Stoke Courcy Barony 1200 acres with pasturage for 1200 sheep. Presently both these feudal rights get split up, and the barony of Nether Stowey, becoming forfeited to the Crown by the attainder of the last Lord Audley, was divided up amongst many claimants. The old order went and the men of trade and commerce stepped in and took the place of the old feudal nobility. Humphrey Blake holds his title *of the King, as of his manor of Hampton Court*, in this lawsuit. The Act for making the manor of Hampton Court an honour, with divers lands and manors attached, dates back to 1540 (31 Henry VIII c. 5). However this may be, the Herald's Visitation of Somerset (1623) amply testifies to the position of the Blake family as landed gentry, *generosi* and *armigeri*. In Commonwealth and indeed in Stuart times Church patronage indicated a peculiar local influence, scarcely intelligible at the present time. There were root divergences of religious

thought, and the Blake family used their territorial influence to secure certain nominations. In the little parish church of Aisholt, close to Plainsfield Court, Blake traditions lasted long. The advowson was originally inherited from the Williams family; then, just before the Civil War it fell into the hands of the King. But in 1660 Humphrey Blake the Admiral's brother held it, then Nathaniel Blake, both described as *generosi*; then Elizabeth Blake, *vidua*. As late as 1790 a rector, Nathaniel Blake Brice, seems to point to a kind of continuity of family patronage derivable from the days when the Blakes held the contiguous Quantock manors of Tuxwell and Plainsfield.

Blake influences in Church appointments can be traced also at this time in the ecclesiastical annals of Over Stowey, where a Caractacus Butler, evidently a Blake nominee and associated very closely with the family as joint patron of Aisholt living, was appointed in 1671.

At Enmore the Church patronage appears also to have passed for the time into the hands of two men of Puritan traditions, Hugh Saffin or Saffyn, of a family known at Bicknoller and Lydeard St. Lawrence on the west side of the Quantocks, and *Nathaniel Blake clericus*. About this time that notorious wastrel of the Restoration, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, was owner of Enmore, and under the circumstances, the nomination of a Puritan rector might have been for the benefit of the parishioners. The earl died at the early age of thirty-three, chiefly owing to his extravagant excesses, his father confessor towards the end of his career being the celebrated Bishop Burnet, who has left on record some curious stories of this poor Restoration wastrel.

In Over Stowey Church there is still an inscription to Humphrey Blake of Over Stowey, clothier, buried March 20th, 1619: also to Ann his wife who died December 9th, 1645, On the south wall there is a monument to John Blake, junior, of Court House (Plainsfield), who died May 2nd, 1723, aged 32. In Nether Stowey churchyard there are inscriptions to Roger Blake who died July 15th, 1785, aged 66 : to Jane wife of Roger Blake and daughter of Lancelot St. Albyn of Alfoxton who died March 29th, 1751 : also of Robert Blake of Churchill in this county, son of Roger and Jane Blake, who died March 2nd, 1830, aged 86 years : also to Frances his wife who died October 31st, 1848, aged 88 :

and to Frances St. Albyn their daughter who died January 9th, 1864, aged 75.

Knowle (or Knoll) Hill was not so closely associated with the history of the Blake family as Tuxwell or Plainsfield manor. It had formed part of the old Nether Stowey Barony in feudal days, like Plainsfield, and had been purchased by Blake's father. The income of the estate was calculated to be in those days about £200 a year, and it was here that Robert Blake first lived when, after his Oxford career, he took up the management of the family affairs. He seems to have been very fond of this spot, as his biographer says that he took much pleasure in the walks round his lands at or near Knoll, *in which walks he was very contemplative; and I have heard his brother say, who was wont to take these walks himself, that he learned to do so by his practice with him.*

The view westward from Knoll Hill takes in the wide plains around Bridgwater, from which it is two or three miles distant, with the tidal Parret meandering across a dyked and empoldered region. In those days the road that runs in a straight line from Bridgwater to Downend, just at the foot of the Poldens, did not exist. At Downend itself, once a separate manor and called in old documents the *Burgh de capite montis*, " was an ancient landing place, Downend Pylle being reckoned within the boundaries by water of the borough of Bridgwater. Here the River Parret itself used to run up close to the hill and form a distinct loop, a geographical feature still to be recognized in old maps. The Admiral, therefore, at Knoll Hill would be in very quick and close touch with the River Parret itself and would get the earliest information from ships and traders. His partiality for the Polden ridge as apart from the Quantocks would thus be easily understood, and Downend Pylle was an active place in Blake's days as it had been in far more ancient times. The house the Admiral lived in was said to have been inhabited by a family named Balch for sixty years, and it did not remain long in the possession of the Blakes, but was repurchased from the Admiral's brother or his assignees about 1682 by Robert Balch, member for Bridgwater. Historically the whole region lying between the Poldens and Taunton was full of traditions of King Alfred and his campaign of 878 against the Danes, culminating in the famous battle of Æthandune or Edington, said to be Edington on the Poldens. Downend and Chisley Mount, the little castle or fort overlooking the

Parret still, is associated with the great king's doings and is probably the castle at which the Danes surrendered previously to the signing of the *Peace of Wedmore*.\* In Blake's case the smaller or more local patriotism by no means obscured the larger patriotism. Proud enough of being a *Somerset man, born and bred* he was prouder still of being an Englishman and extremely jealous of the glory of his nation. This was a hard thing to do in Commonwealth times, and it was owing to Blake that the navy was really more English than merely Parliamentary. Naval officers fell under the influence of Admiral Rich, Lord Warwick, yet were never seething with the passions of the mob, *keeping the ring* as the discreet but not violent servants of the Parliament. If a Parliamentary seaport town was threatened by Prince Rupert and Prince Maurice, up sailed a ship or two of the Commonwealth and the intruders had notice to go or be classed, as they really were, as privateers. Supposing a European king sympathized with King Charles and the Royalist exiles wished to come, there lay the *silver streak* between them, patrolled by Commonwealth ships easy for all to see and claiming the honours of the flag. It was best to leave these ocean patrols alone, dipping flag or topsail as they went. Admiral Blake told his seamen *that it was his and their business to act faithfully in their respective stations and to do their duty to their country, whatever irregularities there might be in the councils at home ; and he would often say amongst his officers that State affairs were not their province, but that they were bound to keep foreigners from fooling us.* A wise and historic saying ! He was also heard frequently to say *that he would as freely venture his life to save the King, as ever he did to serve the Parliament.*

The manysided life of Admiral Blake can be illustrated in five different periods. There was the period of his education as a scholar, the period of his commercial life as a man of business engaged in the heavy task of righting the family affairs. Then there was the political period when he took up politics and represented the borough of Bridgwater ; next his fighting life as a colonel in Popham's Regiment, a magnificent levy of 1500 men who have never been excelled in deeds and training.

Finally, there was his career as a naval officer and a *General-at-sea*. The late Professor Burrows, Chichele Professor of History at Oxford, himself a naval officer by training to begin with, has pronounced a strong

encomium on Blake. He stands alone amongst naval and military heroes in the peculiarity of his training for noble deeds. Certainly no other seaman began his career as a naval officer as late as the age of fifty and then crowded into a space of seven years a series of brilliant victories which even Nelson did not surpass in a lifetime.

With these public acts in detail we are not here concerned to treat. They are written broadly in England's annals and furnish a most illustrious page. Clarendon's estimate of him was that he was *of a melancholic and sullen nature, and spent his time most with good fellows who liked his moroseness.* As a character sketch we cannot accept this as true, for although Robert Blake was of a serious temperament, as indeed he had cause to be, he was by no means lacking in a genial and pleasant West-Country bonhomie which made him the idol of his sailors. He was open and chivalrous enough in fight and was of invincible courage. What cavalier of the day could have surpassed him in courtesy and in the rules of chivalrous bearing than when he met with a French man-o'-war, a ship of forty guns, in the Straits of Gibraltar? Commanding the captain to come on board his ship Blake asked him whether he was willing to deliver up his sword. The Frenchman boldly answered *No*, and then the English Admiral bade him return to his ship and fight it out as long as he was able. A strange tournament, we exclaim, as we call it up ! Fought out there upon the heaving space of blue waters with no other witness but the clouds of heaven. The duel ended with the victory of the English crew after a stern engagement of two hours, and then, with torn rigging and splintered decks, the Frenchman yielded, kissing his sword impulsively as he handed it to the victorious Admiral. The celebrated duel between Captain Broke of the *Shannon* and Captain Lawrence of the *Chesapeake* off Boston harbour has often been quoted, but this naval duel of Admiral Blake is more noticeable, as Englishmen were then fighting for the honour of the flag and were struggling to lay the first foundations of national strength by sea.

The fact is there were so many great exploits done by Blake, both by sea and land, that we hardly know which to select as most typical or as most honourable. What more gallant than the defence of Lyme? or of Taunton ? Blake was the very mainspring of that tough resistance against odds of an

overwhelming kind, proving how a *Puritan*, as he was scoffingly called, could fight even against such a skilled captain of the age as Prince Rupert. As long as English history is read the contrast between Blake's Somerset men and Goring's rascally and debauched troopers will remain and point the moral of quiet and sober courage. When Blake became General-at-sea he was equally at home, as a Blake naturally would be, and chased Prince Rupert's fleet from the Irish Seas to the Mediterranean. He subdued the Scilly Islands, which had been made a centre of Royalist resistance, he humbled the pride of Spain, reduced Portugal to reason, broke the naval power of Holland, (the most difficult task of all), suppressed the rovers of Barbary, who had been the curse of the seas for centuries, and twice triumphed over Spain. Perhaps the capture of the Spanish Plate-fleet off Cadiz is of the greatest interest to Bridgwater people, because a ship called the *Bridgwater* was engaged. Blake and Montagu had long been investing the Spanish port when the Plate-fleet was expected, challenging the Spaniards who could not be prevailed to leave the shelter of their forts and castles. Blake and his crew suffered much from want of fresh water and provisions and from the wearisome monotony of keeping up a blockade during the winter months. Fortunately, the opportunity for striking a blow came when Blake was close to Wyers Bay in Portuguese territory and the glad news came that the Spanish merchantmen were sighted at last. Hoisting all sail, Stayner, Blake's right-hand captain, swooped down upon the Spaniards like a falcon on its prey, and the action was fought amidst the horrors of the growing night. Stayner had three ships with him, the *Speaker*, the *Bridgwater*, and the *Plymouth*, and with them, first of all, he engaged eight Spanish men-o'-war and the galleons within four leagues of Cadiz Bay. The Spanish admiral, Don Marco del Porto, with 600,000 pieces of eight on board, ran his ship ashore, thinking the rocks more hospitable than the shot and shell of the English. Two ships, one commanded by Don Francisco de Esquevil, in which were 1,200,000 pieces of eight, and another commanded by Don Rodriguez Calderon, were fired, one designedly and by the Spanish crew themselves, the other by accident. In one of them the Marquis of Badajos, Viceroy of Mexico, with his wife and eldest daughter, betrothed to the Duke of Medina, perished in the flames. His other

daughter and his two sons, Don Francisco de Lopez, and Don Joseph de Sunega, and nearly 100 others, were saved by Blake's seamen. The Rear Admiral with 2,000,000 pieces of eight on board was taken and secured. So also was another ship richly laden with hides and cochineal. A man-o'-war and an advice-boat got into Gibraltar and the other two ships ran ashore and bulged. Six of these eight were destroyed or made prizes. Admiral Blake ordered Montagu home with the Plate-ships, and coming to Portsmouth, the silver was taken out and carried by land in many waggons to London and so through the city to the Tower, where it was coined. The prisoners, among whom was the young Marquis of Badajos, were brought up with the plate and entertained in the Tower. *The sight occasioned great discourse and joy, and Oliver, whose glory was radiant before, received a new increase of it by this achievement.*" Edmund Waller the poet of the Commonwealth, thought fit to celebrate Cadiz in verse, and although his muse does not strike the critic as rising altogether to the occasion, still there are a few lines which were passable, as they indicated the fact of England's naval supremacy. For instance : —

Others may use the ocean as their road,  
Only the English make it their abode ;  
Whose ready sails with every wind can fly  
And make a cov'nant with the inconstant sky.  
Our oaks secure as if they there took root,  
We tread on billows with a steady foot.

Apropos of the treasures, the poet sang not so discreetly about Cromwell : —

Let the rich ore forthwith be melted down  
And the State fixed, by making him a Crown ;  
With Ermine clad and Purple, let him hold  
A Royal sceptre made of Spanish gold.

Whether the Protector would have accepted a crown made of the captured wealth of Spanish galleons is more than doubtful. The Admirals humble biographer, speaking the gossip of his family, thought these lines would have been very disagreeable to Blake as a simple State servant. In his own private opinion Blake understood that there was no Government in the country but the Commonwealth, and this was what the English fleet was fighting to maintain. However, it seems tolerably certain that the great Admiral did not live to criticize the effusions of the poet of the day, much though he might have sympathized with the poet on patriotic grounds.

The Cadiz capture recalled the old days of

the *Madre di Dios* again, after an interval of fifty years, and old salts round Bridgwater and the Severn ports must have furbished up again their yarns of Sir Robert Crosse. Blake himself, born in 1598, might just have linked the interval with memories of what he had seen and heard, and remembered how the little villages of Spaxton and Over Stowey had been thrilled with tales of *derring do*.

For, if we think of it, Blake's lifetime, although he lived only sixty years, covered a marvellous and epoch-making time. He knew the England of Shakespeare and of Sir Walter Raleigh; the England of Queen Elizabeth, of King James, and of Charles the First. Born ten years after the defeat of the Armada, he lived to see Spain — proud Spain — humbled to the dust for her crimes in the Old World and the New. And of many great events he might have said, *Quorum pars magna fui!*

It is necessary to think of Admiral Blake not only as a man of action, but a man of thought deeply influenced by religion. It has been objected to him by some that he was tinged with Puritan principles of a somewhat dour and destructive tendency, and this prejudice was surely in Clarendon's mind when he passed his judgment of this great Englishman. It may be well, however, to offer a few remarks on some aspects of *Puritanism* such as it was in King Charles's day and as it was professed by the Blake family and others. Clearly Blake's Puritanism was not fashioned, to begin with, on the stern and hard Calvinistic model. His father Humphrey had left in his will small sums of money to Wells Cathedral, to Bridgwater Church, and to Paulet Church, thus endowing Episcopacy. The Admiral's brother, Humphrey, was churchwarden of St. Mary's Church, and the Admiral himself was duly baptized as a member of the Church of England.

Episcopacy, therefore, was clearly acknowledged by two generations of Blakes at least, and we are told that when Humphrey Blake was driven by persecution to emigrate to Carolina, his son Joseph, becoming one of the lord-proprietors of the colony and an important personage, was the first governor who established a settled income and a handsome allowance for a Church of England minister. This was a very generous act, as Joseph Blake had small occasion to love Episcopacy in its extreme Caroline developments.

There was evidently a distinction in

Blake's time between the Church of England as it had been left by the Elizabethan settlement and what it was about 1630-50. It seemed to be undergoing some real and radical change. In the will of a certain Somerset lady, Bridget Mahatt, dated 1655, within a year or so of Blake's death, there is this significant protestation: *I die a true Christian in that religion which was established in the Church of England in Queen Elizabeth's time*. That is to say, Bridget Mahatt distinguished between two phases of the same Church, clear enough to her mind, and she desired to die in the Protestant faith of Elizabethan rather than of Caroline times.\* In 1660 Hugh Peard of West Harptre, by his will dated September 13th, bequeathed to the parish Bishop Hall's works in folio with a shelf to place it on and a chain to fasten it with. Bishop Hall had been an old pupil at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and was suspected of what his enemies in the Caroline days called Puritanism. But Hall had his own rightful position in the Church of England, and might easily have retorted to his Caroline critics that he represented the Church of England as left, doctrinally and otherwise, by the great struggle culminating, in Elizabethan days. At any rate Mr. Peard of Harptre thought that in 1660 his works should find a place in every church library alongside of Jewel's famous *Apology* and the Paraphrase of *Erasmus* and other works which really standardized the great doctrines of the Church of England as far as they could be standardized, by vigorous and incisive language, such as we find thundered forth in the Church homilies themselves. The style and diction of these Church homilies are old fashioned, but, doctrinally, they are plain enough on fundamental teaching.

Bishop Hall suffered much for his leanings to Puritanism, and to use his own words, *The billows went so high that I was three several times upon my knee to His Majesty (Charles I) to answer these great criminations.... I plainly told the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury (Laud) that rather than be obnoxious to the slanderous tongues of misinformers I would cast up my rochet.*" However, in December, 1642, he was committed to the Tower, his estates and rents being sequestered as a notorious delinquent, although he was actually Bishop of Norwich at the time. He wrote an account of his privation, under the title of *Hard Measure* (*Biographical Dictionary*).

Bridget Mahatt was the wife of Philip

Mahatt, vicar of East Brent, and he is said to have been a cousin of Bishop Lake, the Bishop of Bath and Wells before the days of William Laud.\* The distinction alluded to in Bridget Mahatt's will gathers still more force from this connection. Bishop Lake was, we are told, a Puritan bishop, if controversialists of the age would have allowed the reasonable sense of this appellation. He stood for the Elizabethan interpretation. Bishop Laud for the Caroline. Bishop Lake was an intimate friend of such a distinguished clergyman as the Rev. John White, a Fellow of New College, Oxford, and rector of Dorchester for forty years, known as the *Puritan Divine* and the father of the Massachusetts colony. He was a man of great godliness, profound scholarship and wonderful ability, and his name is still honoured on both sides of the Atlantic. John White was plundered at Dorchester by Prince Rupert's Horse, and came to London to be made rector of Lambeth and one of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. These little incidents throw light upon the state of the Church of England in Blake's time. It was not hard to guess which side he would take. By a strange and unfortunate chance Laud harried and worried the Somerset Puritans sadly, and almost drove them to extremities. His successor, Bishop Pierce, suspended one of Blake's favourite ministers in Bridgwater, and enjoined Humphrey Blake, his brother, to do penance as a favourer of the delinquent. Were these petty persecutions necessary? Were they wise? Robert Blake, a learned scholar himself, with Oxford traditions, was fully able to point out the proper position, doctrinally or otherwise, of the Church of England as it was in the days of Queen Elizabeth. There have been and, probably, will always continue to be two parties in the English Episcopal Church, and certain distinct lines of cleavage were apparent enough in 1630-50. We are not concerned to defend one position at the expense of another, for the controversy would lead us far afield, but simply to explain Robert Blake's attitude, common not only to him but to many others. At this date the terms "*Anglican*" or "*Anglo-Catholic*", as applied to the Church, were unknown. The attempts to divide England into Presbyterian *classes*, although formulated, fell still-born. There was never any real enthusiasm at that time for Presbyterianism, nor any burning zeal to upset the old parochial church system if it could be purified. There were, of course,

great leaders of thought and opinion, and the Admiral would have preferred George Abbot to William Laud as his Metropolitan, Arthur Lake to William Pierce as his Diocesan, whilst his general attitude on doctrinal points would have been more in agreement with the writings and opinions of Bishop Jewel, the West-Country divine, and Joseph Hall, Bishop of Norwich. These men were, of course, the theological prototypes of Bishop Burnet and of Archbishop Tillotson who came after them.

Next to Blake's religion must be considered that burning flame of patriotism which illumined his whole soul as an Englishman and fired his blood as a seaman. Nothing aroused his wrath more than the idea of ship-money, which was levied, not for the sake, as he saw, of national protection, or *to keep out foreigners and prevent their fooling Englishmen*, but to let them in by shoals and bring England under their influence.

Blake and William Strode were at one with Hampden here. Close to Bridgwater and living at Brymore in Cannington was John Pym, the stalwart friend of constitutional government. Here is a passage from a letter of Walter Strickland to John Pym dated November 19th, 1642: *I am more and more confirmed that there are designs upon Harwich, Yarmouth, Hull and Portsmouth, and that it is intended to have considerable forces at sea to beat the Parliament's ships, if it be possible.\*\** Why should Strode, Blake, Pym, and the rest be forced to subscribe money to build ships with which would at once be turned against their own liberties? They were not men of this stamp and naturally objected to forging their own fetters.

Further, there was the King's marriage with Henrietta Maria of France, a marriage cordially detested by Englishmen as a rule. This had been preceded by the attempt to secure a Spanish match in 1623 when Prince Charles, accompanied by Buckingham, had paid a visit to *His Most Catholic Majesty*. This continental flirtation and these dynastic intrigues brought nothing but trouble to England, and the French marriage was the unluckiest event in the unlucky life of the weak and uxorious Charles I. The Queen might influence the King, and behind the Queen stalked the shadow of a father confessor, possibly a Jesuit. Englishmen like Blake cared little for political Jesuits and their ways. The Queen herself in 1642 was on the side of England's bitterest antagonists by sea

— a, point that touched Blake and the rest of the English seamen to the quick — and from the Hague in January, 1642, the Queen, who had gone thither ostensibly on a visit to her daughter Mary, the wife of the Stadtholder, William of Orange, began to organize naval forays against England. The Hague had been the asylum of two very evil counsellors of King Charles, viz. Chief Secretary Windebank and Lord Keeper Finch. In addition to sea rivalry and fishing disputes, the fact of the Hague being used as a base against Parliamentary England by the Queen sharpened the animosity of the Commonwealth leaders. Here is an extract from a letter written to John Pym by Walter Strickland from the Hague (November 19th, 1642): —

*The Queen is not satisfied with the small number of ships (from Holland against England). Some think that others will meet her on the way and make her able to do something against our fleet or to get some place in England, Harwich, Yarmouth, Hull or Portsmouth. All these machinations of the Queen would be well known to Robert Blake through John Pym.*

As one result of these intrigues, which lost none of their venomous meaning because hatched in a professedly Protestant state as Holland, English trade suffered everywhere. The massacre of Englishmen by the Dutch at Amboyna in 1623, and the expulsion of England from the Spice Islands, grated on the feelings of Blake and the Commonwealth leaders. There was no security for English trade anywhere, not even in the home waters. The complaint of the Earl of Warwick is notorious in which he stated that Irish pirates, whose field of unlawful adventure covered the seas from Ushant to the ports of the Severn Sea, were making captures of English merchantmen. Intolerable ignominy! How could even a Cavalier or Loyalist say that the arm of their Prince protected them in their lawful occupations? *It grieves me much,* wrote Lord Warwick, *that I cannot help them or send any of our ships to take these rogues. All our ships are out of victuals and none of them go well enough to catch them, except the "Providence" and the "Expedition" which might be fitted out for the service.* The Royal Navy could not catch a pirate!

The following extracts from the State Papers supplement this evidence: —

*June, 1629. A French man-of-war lies between the Holms and Bridgwater and took a "Trow" [i.e. a small coasting smack] which was coming to Bristol with lead. The Englishmen told them of the*

*Peace, and the Frenchmen answered they knew not nor did they care.*

*Dec, 1631. Petition of Robert Pawlet, John Norris, Comptrollers of Customs at Bridgwater and Minehead, to Lords of Admiralty about the English and Irish coasts being infested with Biscayners, etc.*

*May, 1634. Petition of Robert Pawlet, sometime Customer of Bridgwater and Minehead, to the Lords of the Admiralty for relief concerning losses for more than three years by piracy of certain Dutch of Rotterdam.*

In August, 1629, an order was issued that in consequence of the decay of the town of Bridgwater, that town shall hereafter pay for itself and for the tithing of Heygrove no more than one-eighth part of the sum assessed upon the hundred of North Petherton towards furnishing the provision of His Majesty's household.

It was time, indeed, for men like Robert Blake to gird on their armour and man their own ships. *What! a Frenchman off the Holms!* we can fancy Blake exclaiming, and at the same time twirling his moustaches, a habit of his when spurred by righteous wrath. Englishmen saw two kinds of fetters being forged for them: first, the political fetters of their own misguided King (the most galling of all to Englishmen), listening to such men as Chief Justice Finch, who actually endeavoured to revive the Forest Laws and exact the Forest Fines. In the words of Lord Falkland, who impeached him, *he gave our goods to the King, our lands to the deer, and our liberties to the Sheriffs.* Even Lord Clarendon pointed out the unwisdom of such measures. Behind the King's ministers and backing them up were the King's foreign auxiliaries. In a letter (October 126th, 1634) from Francis Windebank (who died in the Roman Catholic faith) we learn that the King of Spain had promised twenty ships to coerce King Charles's subjects! Shades of Sir Francis Drake, Captain Crosse, and Walsingham, we exclaim! This was carrying Court intrigue too far!

The other fetters threatened were spiritual fetters. Englishmen whose fathers had gone through the perilous times of Queen Elizabeth knew too well what these meant. The Blakes and Strodes and all Severn merchants, whose occupations had led them continually to Bilbao and San Sebastian, had a first-hand acquaintance with the country ruled over by *His Most Catholic Majesty*. They required no further lessons. The sailors of

Bridgwater who brought the first news of the coming of the Armada, as already noted, were the sailors of Humphrey Blake. In other parts of England the Spanish, and indeed the continental, danger might be half known or, perhaps, misunderstood. Not so in Severn waters, a first line of quick intelligence, whither the beacon signals of alarm were likely to come more swiftly than even to London.

Blake's attitude towards the Roman Catholic faith, a very militant and aggressive faith in his day and in the days of his father and grandfather, is best shown in the following episode. *The Admiral being at Malaga, some of his seamen going ashore met the Host (the consecrated element) carried about, and not only paid no respect to it but laughed at those who did. Whereupon, one of the Spanish priests put the people upon resenting this indignity, and they fell upon the English and beat them severely. When they returned to the ship they complained of this usage to the Admiral, upon which he immediately sent a trumpeter to the Viceroy to demand the priest who was the chief instrument in that ill usage. The Viceroy answered that he had no authority over the priests and so could not dispose of them. Upon this Admiral Blake sent word that he would not inquire who had the power to send the priest to him, but if he were not sent within three hours he would burn their town. The Spaniards hearing this, obliged the Viceroy to send the priest to the Admiral, and he justified himself upon the petulant behaviour of the sailors. Blake answered that if he had sent a complaint to him he would have punished his men severely, since he would not suffer them to affront the established religion of any place. But he took it ill that he should set the Spaniards on to do it, for he would have all the world to know that an Englishman was only to be punished by an Englishman. So he treated the priest civilly and sent him back, contenting himself with the thought that he had him in his power. Cromwell was highly delighted with this and read the letter himself in Council, saying that he hoped he should make the name of an Englishman as great as that of a Roman. The justice which Admiral Blake would have measured out to the Spaniards was not the kind in vogue throughout Spain. Their officials were accustomed to treat all heretics" with severity, and there is an entry in *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic* (Henry VIII) from which we learn that two British subjects, Bridgwater men, were sentenced to public penance in the Church of St. Sebastian and to pay 600 ducats within three days, and, further, to stay within the town for two years*

*on penalty of 10,000 ducats, all because, six years previously, they had said that they did not believe in the Pope and in the prayers to saints."* At the same time a boy of Bridgwater was fined twenty ducats for words spoken in England. On one occasion Admiral Blake fluttered the doves at Rome when, in 1654, he appeared off Leghorn. *The city of Rome and all the Pope's territories were alarmed at the name and approach of Blake. Several of the principal citizens retired with their effects to the mountains, though Sir Richard Tambot, as the Italians call him, assured Cardinal Berberini, the Cardinal patron of England, that Cromwell had given no orders to insult the patrimony of St. Peter. Yet the terror of the people was such, that public processions were made and the Host exposed forty hours to avert the wrath of heaven should Blake attack the dominions of the Church. New works were raised around the Chapel of Loretto to defend it. Upon his arrival in sight of Leghorn he despatched his secretary to demand of the Great Duke £60,000 for the damages sustained by the English in his duchy, where Prince Rupert had taken so many ships belonging to the English ... The Great Duke offered to pay part of the sum and desired him to consult the Pope about the payment of the rest. Blake replied that the Pope had nothing to do with it and that he expected the whole sum from him. Upon this the Duke paid down 35,000 Spanish and 25,000 Italian pistoles. The Duke pretended that some of the ships had been sold to the subjects of the Pope and therefore his Holiness ought to pay part of the damage, which Alexander VII did, and paid him 20,000 pistoles, the only "Peter's pence" that was ever brought from Rome and put into the treasury of England."*

Whatever his opinions on the more burning Church questions of the day, it would be impossible to ignore the strong vein of personal religion that ran through Admiral Blake's life and character. He lived in contentious times but in a homely practical way the Admiral tried to do his duty as a simple straightforward Englishman without cant or fuss. His biographer writes : *I was told by a countryman of his and mine, Mr. Thomas Bear of Bridgwater, when he was afterwards mayor of that town, that though he was with him two or three years and officiated and lay in Blake's cabin, he never heard an oath sworn aboard that ship or indeed aboard the whole fleet. It has been said that General Blake prayed himself aboard his ship with such of his men as could be admitted to that duty with him, and the last thing he did, after he had given his commands and word to his men, in order to retire to his bed, was to pray with the above-mentioned Mr. Bear. When that was over*

*he was wont to say, "Thomas, bring me the pretty cup of sack" which he did with a crust of bread. He would then sit down and give Thomas liberty to do the same and inquire what news he had heard of his Bridgwater men that day, and talk of the people and affairs of that place.*

Here came in that old spirit of West-Country sympathy and camaraderie which carried these West-Country crews together towards the attainment of their laudable ends, whether it was to seek for the North-East or North-West Passage or, still better, to fight the enemies of their country. No wonder that *his tenderness and generosity to the seamen so endeared him to them that when he died they lamented his loss as a common father.* Whenever a Day of Thanksgiving or of Humiliation was ordered by Parliament it may be noted that Admiral Blake always kept them and had them observed. Penance with him, as with many other Puritans, was a real religious duty and it was a public and congregational matter.

The circumstances of the death of Admiral Blake were glorious and at the same time deeply pathetic. Blake had heard that the Spanish Plate-fleet was on its homeward voyage in 1657 and that it would probably put in at Santa Cruz in the island of Teneriffe, a strongly fortified station in the Canaries. Leaving the blockade of Cadiz he sailed at once for Santa Cruz. There he found the Spanish galleons already anchored and protected not only by sixteen men-o'-war, but by a well-fortified bay and by a castle. There were also seven forts each mounted with heavy artillery, all united by a line of communication and manned with musketeers. Enough to terrify and appal a less stout heart than that of Robert Blake! But already in answer to the Dey of Tunis, who braggingly cried, *Here are our castles of Gulletta and Porto Ferino, do your worst, we fear you not!* Blake had replied by shot and shell and had struck terror into the hearts of the sea rovers of the age. No castle or fort could withstand his onset. It was the Spaniard's turn now, and the Admiral Don Diego Diagues was to learn a stern lesson. In Santa Cruz harbour was a Dutch skipper who, knowing something about Blake and his seamen, craved leave to quit the harbour as a neutral. *Get you gone if you will and let Blake come if he dares!* was the answer of the piqued and enraged Spaniard who thought himself secure. And Admiral Blake did come, and where, in 1797, the great Nelson failed, won a brilliant and most

unparalleled success. Again Captain Stayner, who the year before had commanded the *Speaker*, *Bridgwater* and *Plymouth* frigates, swooped upon the galleons, boldly standing in for the harbour.

What he and Blake did then is ranked amongst the greatest of British naval achievements, and when the English ships, almost miraculously it is said, returned from the swoop into the bay favoured by the wind that sprung up, they had captured the galleons and annihilated the Spanish fleet.

This victory was the climax of Blake's naval successes and at the same time marked the end of his career. Slowly the fleet returned to England covered with much glory, but at the same time carrying a dying Admiral. With a frame weakened with wounds and sickness but with a spirit struggling bravely to the last, his one passionate desire being to see again the shores of old England, Robert Blake was borne from the Canaries to Plymouth. Lovely was that island of Teneriffe, beautiful its orange groves, rivalling those of Seville, magnificent its towering peak lifted 12,000 feet to the subtropical skies, splendid the numerous and countless forms of nature by sea and land, but, far from the scene of his triumph, lay Blake's island home for which he yearned. Shall I live to see the ridges of the Poldens? or the long low line of the Quantocks? or the grey muddy reaches of old Father Parret meandering up the green moorlands? or the old bridge of Bridgwater and the Cornhill and the old familiar West-Country faces I know so well? They will greet me, and nothing better than such a home-coming as this! Then I will, perchance, rest awhile, if my country's needs permit it! Alas I the hopes of the dying sailor were not destined to be fulfilled nor his *passionate* desire to be granted him. The fleet sighted Plymouth, and as the ships came up by the Eddystone the sailors might have seen the green slopes of Mount Edgcumbe, the Hamoaze, Drake's Island, the Hoe, the houses of the old town of Plymouth rising like a city they loved from the sea, and behind the Devon highlands and the moorland. But not the Severn Sea or the combs and hills of Somerset! And so Robert Blake's spirit passed away on the element he knew so well, the heaving, changing, restless sea. We may conclude with a stanza or so of that well-known poem by Henry Newbolt on the death of the Admiral (August 7, 1657).

Low on the field of his fame, past hope lay the  
Admiral triumphant, And fain to rest him after  
all his pain :

Yet, for the love that he bore his own land ever  
unforgotten He prayed to see the western hills again.

Fainter than stars in a sky long grey with the  
coming of the daybreak.

Or sounds of night that fade when night is done,  
So in the death-dawn faded the splendour and loud  
renown of warfare,

And life of all its longings kept but one.

Oh ! to be there for an hour when the shade draws  
in beside the hedgerows,

And falling apples wake the drowsy noon :

Oh ! for the hour when the elms grow sombre and  
human in the twilight.

And gardens dream beneath the rising moon.

Only to look once more on the lands of the  
memories of childhood.

Forgetting weary winds and barren foam :

Only to bid farewell to the combe and the orchard  
and the moorland.

And sleep at last among the fields of home !

Dreams ! only dreams of the dead ! For the great  
heart faltered on the threshold,

And darkness took the land this soul desired !

The heart of Admiral Blake was taken from his body and buried in St. Andrew's, the mother church of Plymouth, where a sermon was preached over it by the learned Obadiah Hughes. The body was embalmed and taken to Greenwich, whence it was conveyed by water on September 4th, 1657, to London, with all due solemnity, in a barge of State covered with black velvet and adorned with escutcheons. In addition to his brother Humphrey and his immediate relations, the cortege consisted of the members of the Privy Council, the Lords of the Admiralty, the Commissioners of the Navy, the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, the Field Officers of the Army, and several other persons of honour and quality rowed in boats draped in mourning and marshalled by heralds-at-arms. Blake's body was buried finally in a vault made on purpose in Henry the Seventh's Chapel, but to the eternal disgrace of English rulers at the Restoration it was taken from there and transferred to the churchyard outside. Such revenges are paltry and mean. But what else could you expect from Charles II and his profligate Court ?

It is strange that no public memorial was ever erected to Robert Blake in Bridgwater till the year 1898, when, owing to the untiring zeal and enthusiasm of Dr. Winterbotham, a prominent leader in that town, a sum of

money was raised to erect a statue to his honour. In 1897 Professor Montagu Burrows, Chichele Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford and Captain R.N., prepared the way by reading an appreciative notice before the members of the Somerset Archaeological Society. The statue, the work of Frederick Pomeroy, with two bas-reliefs giving stirring scenes in the hero's life, was subscribed for and completed, and now stands for all to see in the Cornhill. The features and attitude of the Admiral were copied from a painting in the possession of the Rev. Raymond Pelly, of Great Malvern, a direct descendant of the Admiral's niece, Sally Hitchin Blake. Stranger, we would say, if you pass this way and love honour, piety, and simplicity, and that noble patriotism that works for England solely and keeps her foes, whether inside the gate or out of it, *from fooling her*, take off your hat to Robert Blake's statue as it stands in the Cornhill, Bridgwater.

#### THE WILL OF ROBERT BLAKE

*The last will and testament of me, Robert Blake, written with my own hand as followeth : First, I bequeath my soul unto the hands of my most merciful Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, by Him to be presented to His heavenly Father, pure and spotless, through the washing of His Blood which He shed for the remission of my sins, and, after a short separation from the body to be again united with the same by the power of His Eternal Spirit, and so to be ever with the Lord.*

*Item, unto the town of Bridgwater I give ;£100 to be distributed amongst the poor thereof at the discretion of Humphrey Blake, my brother, and of the Mayor for the time being.*

*Item, unto the town of Taunton I give £100 to be distributed among the poor of both parishes at the discretion of Samuel Perry, once my Lieutenant-Colonel, and Mr. George Newton, Minister of the Gospel there, and of the Mayor for the time being.*

*Item, I give unto Humphrey Blake, my brother, the manor of Crandon-cum-Puriton, with all the rights thereto appertaining, to him and to his heirs for ever.*

*Item, I give unto my brother, Dr. Wm. Blake, £300.,*

*Item, unto my brother George Blake I give £300, also to my brother Nicholas I give ;£300.*

*Item, unto my brother Benjamin Blake I give my dwelling-house, situate in St. Mary's Street, Bridgwater, with the garden and appurtenances, as also my other house, thereto adjoining, purchased of the widow Coxe ; likewise I give unto*

him all the claims I have in eleven acres of meadow or pasture (more or less) lying in the village of Hamp, in the Parish of Bridgwater, lately in the possession of the widow Vincombe, deceased.

Item, unto my sister Bridget Bowdich, the wife of Henry Bowdich, of Chard Stock, I give £100, and to her children, of the body of Henry Bowdich aforesaid, I give the sum of £200 to be disposed among them according to the discretion of Humphrey, William, George, Nicholas and Benjamin Blake, aforesaid, my brothers, or any three of them.

Item, unto my brother Smythes, goldsmith, in Cheapside, I give the sum of £100.

Item, unto my nephew, Robert Blake, son to Samuel Blake, my brother, deceased, I give the gold chain, bestowed on me by the late Parliament of England, also all the claim I have in an annuity of £20, payable out of the farm at Pawlett.

Item, unto my nephew, Samuel Blake, younger son to Samuel, my brother, deceased, I give £200.

Item, unto Sarah Quarrell, daughter of my late niece, Sarah Quarrell, by her husband, Peter Quarrell, now dwelling in Taunton, I give the sum of £100 to be disposed of for the benefit of the said Sarah Quarrell, according to the discretion of Humphrey, Nicholas and Benjamin Blake, my brothers aforesaid.

Item, unto my nephew John Blake, son unto my brother Nicholas, I give ;£100.

Item, unto my cousin John Avery, of Pawlett, once a soldier with me in Taunton Castle, I give £50.

Item, unto Thomas Blake, son of my cousin Tom Blake, once commander of the "Tresto" frigate, deceased, now aboard of the "Centurion" frigate in the service, I give £50.

Item, all my plate, linen, bedding, with all my provisions, aboard the ship "Naseby" I give unto my nephews Robt. and Samuel Blake, aforesaid, and unto my nephew, John Blake, aforesaid, to be divided by them by even and equal portions.

Item, unto the negro called Domingo, my servant, I give £50, to be disposed of by my aforesaid nephew, Capt. Robt. Blake and Capt. Thomas Adams, for his better education in the knowledge and fear of God.

Item, unto my servants James Knowles and Nicholas Bartlett, I give to each of them £10.

Item, unto the widow Owen, the relict of Mr. Owen, minister, I give £10.

Item, unto Eleanor Potter, widow, I give £10.

All the rest of my goods and chattels I do give

and bequeath unto George, Nicholas, and Benjamin Blake, my brothers aforesaid, and also to Alexander Blake, my brother, to be equally divided amongst them, whom I do appoint and ordain to be the executors of this my last Will and Testament.

Rob Blake.

Signed and sealed aboard the "Naseby,"  
March 13th, 1655, in St. Helens Road in the presence of Roger Cuttons, J. Hynde, John Bourne, Antho. Earning.

Note. — The Admiral's charitable bequest to his native town of Bridgwater was at first carried out in the way it was intended, but Charles II succeeding to the Crown, and the Corporation Test having put the borough of Bridgwater in the hands of men of Restoration principles, not the least notice was taken of Admiral Blake's name in the distribution of his legacy which, from the field his money purchased, was called *Jacob's Land Charity*. The immortal name of the Admiral was dropped by the worshipful corporation as unworthy to be recorded! Could adulation sink deeper? Blake's local biographer, bred in the family, adds, *"I did not know the charity, though I lived in and frequented the place near fifty years. I took it to be Jacob's Charity as well as Jacob's Land till, even in the present reign [George I?], George Balch, Esq., son of Robert Balch, Esq., who was one of the trustees for the bequest, observed to the two other trustees, Mr. Jeanes and Mr. Pitman, honest men of Bridgwater, "It was a shame to forget General Blake in the distribution of his legacy, which should go no more by the name of Jacob's Land but of Admiral Blake's Charity."* By which name it has been known ever since. St. John's Church, East-over, occupies a part of this land, and the school and some houses cover the remainder. In accordance with the suggestion of Hepworth Dixon, the biographer of Robert Blake, this site has been called Blake Place, perpetuating the name of the gift of the Admiral.

\*The history and life of Robert Blake : Esq ; of Bridgwater, general and admiral of the fleets and naval forces of England. Containing a full account of his glorious achievements by sea and land, more especially by Sea ; where he obtained many surprizing Victories over Dutch, French, Spaniards, and others, Turks as well as Christians. To which is added, a sketch of a

*comparison between the two great action against  
the Spaniards at Sancta Cruz and Porto Bello.  
Written by a gentleman bred in his family.*

Author: A Gentleman bred in his family.

[John Oldmixon T. W.]

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opposite the Admiralty-Office, near  
Whitehall ; And R. Davis, at the Corner of  
Sackville-Street, [c1740]. p. 6

\* *Athenæum*, August 18th, 1906

p.8

\* *Somerset Wills*, Brown series

p.9

\* *Brown's Wills*.

\*\* *Bouverie Papers*, Hist. MSS. Commission.

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