CHAPTER ONE

Sit down, Master Hakluyt. I do not mean to dishonour you by receiving you in my kitchen like a servant, but it is the warmest room in the house, and this has been a hard winter for an old man.

I am astonished that you should have ridden all the way from London to Norfolk only to hear a story from me, even so fearful a tale as you have asked me for.

I believe you are right in supposing me to be the only man still alive of those who sailed to America in the *Trinitie* and the *Minion*. Did Queen Elizabeth send you? No? The taste for voyages and explorations seems to have died with her father, perhaps because so many of us told him our story. Many of the young gentlemen who came on that black journey with us rose to be counsellors of the highest in the land. It is no wonder that they did not foster more voyages to America, after what they had seen and done there.

I curse the memory of the day that Master Hore first revealed his audacious plan to me.

That was in the last days of the year 1535. I was then a student of the law at the Inner Temple in London. Master Hore was not a teacher of mine, but like many other young men of that time and place, I often sought out his conversation and visited his chambers, which were full of books and maps, and furnished with a great desk, on opposite ends of which rested a large blue celestial globe and a yellow terrestrial globe.

My involvement in that mad enterprise began one afternoon in the middle of February when, mainly to seek refuge from the cold and from my tedious course of studies, I stumbled into the Woolsack tavern in Fleet Street, near Temple Bar.

It was crowded with fellows as idle as myself, but when I peered into the gloomy corners of the room for a place to sit, I saw something that seemed to speak more of industry

than of idleness: the familiar yellow terrestrial globe, sitting on a table, its beautifully-painted surface perilously close to the flame of a fat candle.

Master Hore himself sat behind it as if at his own desk in the Temple, and kept spinning the globe with his huge fingers, so that the wooden world rotated gracefully under his hands. Each misshapen island and mysterious continent burst into glowing light and then faded as it passed by the flame of the candle.

Master Hore was deep in conversation with a gentleman of his own age and of much the same appearance, except in height, for the latter was about a foot shorter.

I had just decided to find somewhere else to drink my pot of ale rather than interrupt their earnest talk, when Master Hore saw me.

"Ha, Master Thomas Buts! Come here and sit with us. Armigil, this is Thomas Buts, who is a student of the law. Thomas, this is my friend Armigil Wade, who is both a merchant and a lawyer, and thereby doubly cursed by all honest men. Thomas, I have been unfolding a plan to Armigil, and as I know you are a forward fellow, I'll repeat it to you. Look here at my globe."

He rotated the glistening ball, and pointed to the section of it nearest to the candle.

"This, Thomas, is the northeast coast of America, and these two islands are Newfoundland and Cape Briton. Now, these are the parts of America best known to our English sailors and merchants, and so I think those islands most fitted for my project."

"Why, Master Hore, are you going into the salted codfish trade?" I asked, feigning that I was interested.

Armigil Wade laughed loudly at that, and even in the dim light of the tavern, I could see Master Hore's face blacken with anger, which he restrained.

"My aim is far more lofty than that, Thomas! Now, you know very well that I have

not only a fierce interest in cosmography, the mapping of the heavens, but also in the mapping of the Earth, what one might call geography. As a scholar, I like nothing better than a new map, or the report of some fresh voyage to unknown places. It would be better still to see America for myself, instead of learning at second hand from other men's books and letters."

"How will you get there?" I asked. "Have you found someone in the fishing trade who will take passengers?"

"No, I intend to gather together a company of educated gentlemen, who will share the expense of chartering a ship to take us all to America. With our own ship, we shall be free to go wherever our curiosity impels us, instead of being forced to go and return on a fishing vessel which must obey the needs of the cod fishery."

"I have already agreed to join Richard's expedition," Armigil Wade interrupted, banging emphatically on the table with one hand while gesturing with the other for the landlord to be hasty in bringing more ale. "Master Buts, if your only occupation now is studying the law, then all the spring and summer will be free to you. Why not come as well? Hey, landlord, bring more ale for Master Buts, too, and I'll pay for it."

I had not even started drinking from my first pot of ale, but I took a good long draught from it while I absorbed the full meaning of the proposal that had been made to me.

In mounting excitement, I gazed at the wooden globe in front of me. I would be able to see America for myself! My father and mother would probably be glad to be rid of the prospect of having me idle around the house all summer, and I was sure I could persuade my father to contribute my share of the expenses, which would very likely amount to less than the cost of keeping me at home. What was more, I could truly say that the voyage would be for my education.

"Is this a firm plan, Master Hore?" I asked.

"If I can muster enough recruits in the next month so that we can find a ship and make all necessary preparations, we can sail at the end of April."

I finished my pot of ale just as the landlord's arm swooped over my shoulder and plonked the second pot down on the table. Master Hore and his friend fell back into their conversation, discussing the wealth and wonders that the Spanish had found, and plundered, in Mexico.

"We cannot go there," Master Hore told Armigil Wade, "because the Spaniards will not allow English ships into their waters. You remember the enmity that Captain Rut of the *Mary of Guildford* encountered. He had only ventured to Puerto Rico, which, if you will look here at my globe, is not far away from the mainland. We would be sunk if we were rash enough to steer in that direction. Therefore, we must go to the northern parts of America, which belong to England."

I interrupted him at that point.

"Is that true, Master Hore? I thought we had no possessions across the western ocean."

"There you are quite wrong, Thomas," Master Hore told me, pleased by the chance to make a scholarly disquisition. "When John Cabot landed in Newfoundland about forty years ago, he claimed that country for England, and you may sure that the king means to uphold that claim. Newfoundland belongs to England."

"More might have been made of that," Armigil Wade said darkly, "if we hadn't been too busy with our own affairs".

We all fell silent by common consent, not thinking it wise to allude to popular discontent in such a public place. I reflected that a spring and summer spent on the sea and in

America might well be quieter than remaining in England, where it seemed not impossible that we might see wars of religion breaking out at any moment, for this was just when Parliament was dissolving the lesser monasteries.

"Master Hore," I said as I finished my second pot of ale, "I believe I will join your voyage to America. Put my name on your roll of those willing to go. Master Wade, thanks for the ale, and if I do not see you before, then I hope to meet you again when we sail."

Saluting both gentlemen, I rose from the table and stepped out into the icy street to walk the short distance to the Temple.

The cold easterly wind that we know so well in my home here in Norfolk was blowing down Ludgate Hill. I turned round once, and caught a glimpse of the tall spire of St. Paul's like a dark grey finger pointing up into the bitter winter heavens, but the swirling pellets of ice stung my face, and I showed the wind my back again.

Fleet Street was full of beggars, still something of a novelty then. In m father's youth, the beggar was a curious and rare sight, man to be pitied, and his suffering reduced with a scrap of coin. Nearly all of them had some infirmity of body or mind that prevented them from finding a living.

Under King Henry the Eighth, though, England became filled with men who could find no work, for the land was starting to be used for the keeping of sheep, which required only a few shepherds, instead of being used for crops, which had required many agricultural labourers.

The hardships of these unemployed masses were increased by a sudden and powerful rise in the price of everything that was bought and sold, a calamity that not even the wisest man could explain.

The poor useless men burrowing into the leeward doorways and crannies of Fleet

Street were quick to resort to robbery if it might relieve their hunger for half a day, so I hurried on my way with my cloak wrapped tightly around my body, and my left hand on the hilt of my dagger. (I do everything with my left hand, a fault that has remained with me in spite of almost daily flogging for it in my boyhood.) Whether I successfully created a fearsome appearance for myself I cannot say, but nobody assaulted me, and I made my way safely to one of the libraries in the Temple.

The wealth of lawyers provides for certain comforts, and an enormous fire was burning in the room into which I settled. I hung my cloak on the back of a chair, leaving the accumulated snowflakes to melt and drip down and form a puddle on the floor.

I searched among the books for those that contained any description of northern America. Within half an hour I had collected a small pile of neatly-bound books. I sat and read them for the rest of the afternoon without being disturbed, except by the boy who appeared at disgracefully long intervals to tend the fire.

It seemed that the coasts of Newfoundland were well known, and had been visited by many even before John Cabot's hopeful voyage. I read that the codfish were so plentiful that they could be gathered up in a basket, if it were merely weighted with a rock and let down over the side of the ship.

I came upon a handwritten book by a priest who had been sent to a bay of Newfoundland in 1504 to manage the cure of souls of men who were too busy attending to the cure of fish to have much time for him. Some rough hand had torn most of the book away, so that only the first thirty pages of his tale were left.[1]

I also read of unusual articles being brought back to England: bows and arrows,

[1] This book is my novel *Forty Testoons*, from which its author, Father Ralph Fletcher, has prudently removed the politically dangerous passages.

strange birds, and mountain cats. There had even been one expedition, in 1501, that had returned with three native men. They had been taken, almost certainly by force, from Newfoundland and been brought to England to be shown to the king.

The early winter night had fallen when I put down the last of the books that I had picked out. So many voyages, and yet so little description of what these lands were truly like to see and walk upon. I had really wanted to find some pictures, but I could not turn up any. I made a resolution that our expedition must be sure to take along a skilled painter.

Two weeks later, I chanced to meet Master Hore as we were both crossing one of the courtyards of the Temple.

"How many have agreed to come with us?" I asked him.

"More than fifty, Thomas, though I think that some of them have not the spirit to follow their keenness with action, so I expect perhaps half that number to drop out. I am beginning to think that we need to sail in two ships instead of one. Am I to take it that you are still resolved to make the voyage?"

"For sure I am, Master Hore, and there is one thing that I wanted to speak to you about. None of the English voyages has ever come back with any pictures of the land and its people. I believe you should search for a man apt in drawing and painting to complete the record of our travels."

"Why, that is an excellent plan, Thomas, and I shall carry it out. Do you know of any gentleman who has a talent for drawing and who might come with us?"

I looked into my memory. I could think of nobody among the men that I knew in London, but just as I was about to tell Master Hore that I could not help him to find an artist, I remembered one whom I knew better than any other man in the world.

"Master Hore, I believe I know the very man we need, but he lives near my home in

Norfolk, so I cannot propose the venture to him until I go home for Easter. I am sure I can persuade him, though. His name is George Batchelor, and he has been my friend since we were boys. Even then, he was always drawing, and now he makes the most lifelike and beautiful pictures of the places in our countryside. He has a rare skill in drawing people and animals, too."

I suddenly had another idea about George.

"I can recommend him further, in that he can serve in two capacities. He is a monk in a small monastery, so he will soon be seeking other employment, but he is also ordained as a priest, so he could sail with us as a sort of chaplain to the expedition."

"If he is not too devoted to Rome, Thomas, then he sounds like the very man we want, but will there be time? We shall sail around the last days of April, and this year Easter falls on the sixteenth of April. Even if you persuade him at once, you won't have much time to prepare yourselves for the voyage. If he refuses, we shall be pressed to find someone else."

"Never fear, Master Hore, George is a bold fellow who will welcome the challenge, I'm sure of it."

"I place my trust in you, then, Thomas," Master Hore told me, and we walked off in our respective directions.

I toyed with the idea of sending a letter to George, so as to give him time to consider my idea, but then I realised that it would be a waste of effort, for he would almost certainly see my face again before he saw the letter.

For the next month, I busied myself with my books in a sort of grasshopper repentance for my days of idleness in London since my last visit home at Christmas.

I spent a lot of money on candles, staying up until nine o'clock at night, long after all honest folk in London were asleep in bed. It is astonishing, how much law there is in this

kingdom, and how dull it is to learn, although I grant that the law has been a very profitable source of money for me in my life since.

When I had no more studying to do, and had attended to such other duties as were expected of me, I was at last free to leave.

On the fifth of April, I rode out through the city wall of London by Aldgate, and set off for Norfolk.

So as to have some protection from roving gangs of beggars, I travelled with a band of cloth merchants on their way to Lavenham in Suffolk. To pass the time as we rode, I told the merchants about the voyage to America that we would soon be undertaking.

I asked them whether they thought that there might be prospects of establishing trade with the natives of northern America, reminding my companions of the riches that the Spaniards had gained in Mexico and Peru.

Most of the merchants scorned the idea.

"No gold," the oldest merchant explained, "and no silver. The Spaniards were lucky, and made their landfall on the wealthiest parts of the continent. Poor England has only the rocks."

"There is nothing there of value," his nearest companion added, "except the fish, and we take that freely".

The youngest merchant, a fellow of about my own age, had a different view.

"Yet it may be that there is wealth there, if we were only to search for it. I believe nobody has yet ventured far inland from the coast. That is what the Spaniards did, and they found great native empires in Mexico and Peru. Perhaps there are golden cities and noble emperors in Newfoundland, too."

"Sir," I said to him, "you are the sort of man who should come on our voyage, to

examine the products of that country, and report on them to the kind. And, sir, may I ask your name?"

"My name is Oliver Dawbeney, and my home is in London. We have still two days' riding before we reach Lavenham, Master Buts, so you have plenty of time to tell me about this expedition on which you are going. I confess I am tempted to join you. Men of our station of life have never had such an opportunity before. Only sailors and fishermen have seen England's empire in the New World."

We rode on together, talking of the prize that northern America might prove to be for the nation that was resolute enough to seize it. Soon we were familiarly Thomas and Oliver to each other.

At Lavenham we parted, and I joined another group of merchants who were taking the road that goes by my family's home here at Hoxworth.

"Goodbye," Oliver, I said. "If you do decide to sail with us, go to the Temple and ask for Master Hore. We shall be leaving England at the end of the month, so you will have to make up your mind quickly."

"Master Hore, at the Temple, Thomas?" Oliver repeated. "I'll remember."

My new travelling companions turned out to be a gruff and taciturn lot, so I had little conversation with them, and much time for my own thoughts.

We came down into the flat country of my childhood, and I turned off the public road when we reached the neighbourhood of Hoxworth.

I rode slowly through the fields that belonged to my father, Sir William Buts. The labouring men recognised me, and waved in greeting, so I made a triumphal progress to the courtyard of this very house where we are now sitting. The servants scuttled out to help me down and carry in my bags.

"Ho there!" I called as I strode in. "Are any of the family at home? It's me, Thomas."

"Ah, Thomas, you come so soon!" my mother cried, coming down the stairs. "You look well, God be thanked. Dinner is nearly ready. Go up to your room and change your clothes. How are your studies going?"

My father was out inspecting one of the drainage dykes, but he returned to the house at noon, in obedience to the magic clock that ticked inside him, and which seemed able to tell the time to within a few minutes.

Stamping the dirt from his boots, he surveyed me in the same suspicious manner that he would have used while looking at the dykes.

"Are you a lawyer yet, Thomas?" he demanded.

"No, I have another year to spend at my books," I replied. "You must know that well enough."

"Then, since we have you home again for five months, we must find a use for you."

"I may not be a burden to you this year," I said as we went in to dinner. "I have a plan to propose to you."

"How much is this going to cost me?" my father asked.

We sat down at the great table, which had been old even before the wars of York and Lancaster.

"No more, perhaps less, than it would cost you to keep me here. What do you say to my spending this summer in America?"

"What?" my father and mother both exclaimed at once.

"I have been invited to join a scholarly group of gentlemen who will take a ship to Cape Briton and Newfoundland before May Day," I began, and unfolded the whole scheme to them.

My mother declared that it was far too dangerous an undertaking, but my father's reaction was negative in tone rather than in substance.

"If he is stupid enough to go, it is as well that it is hazardous, for the world might well be rid of anyone foolish enough to join this jape," he said.

I ignored the insult, and instead eagerly seized upon his implication I could go if I wished. "If you will lend me the cost of two passages, I will undertake to repay you."

"Out of what?" my father enquired.

"Out of the profits from the trade in which we shall engage," I answered, dreaming in that moment of Oliver Dawbeney's rich cities in the interior of Newfoundland, full of gold, pyramids, and temples.

"And why *two* passages?" my father demanded, altering his attack. "Do you expect me to come with you?"

"No, Father, but I shall invite George Batchelor to come as the expedition's artist and chaplain."

"Now I know my son is mad," my father growled, "and since that rogue Batchelor is to accompany him, perhaps the pair of them will get sunk. You may go, with my money, but not with my blessing. I believe you would have been of no use shambling around the house all summer, anyway."

"Father, thank you!" I cried, and my father replied with a snort, while my mother began to snuffle behind her hand. We said little more to one another during the meal.

Next morning, when my father rode out to the fields, I accompanied him part of the way, but when I tried to discuss my plans with him, all he said was "You, going to America!", and offered the opinion that America would be better used as a place for beggars and criminals.

I attempted to reason with him, but he was even more contrary than usual, and so when he turned away from me into the fields, I rode straight on until I came to the track that led to the monastery of St. Anne, just outside the boundary of the parish of Hoxworth.

As I approached the pale grey buildings, I jumped off my mare and led her by the bridle to the gateway.

When I tinkled the warped old bell, I was surprised to see that the head that issued forth wore a fine velvet cap over the shaven patch that was a monk's tonsure.

"Yes, what do you want?" I was asked, and with a shock I realised that it was the same old porter under the rich new cap.

"I'm Thomas Buts, and you should remember me. Oh, of course, you haven't seen me with a beard before."

The kind had introduced the fashion of wearing beards, and I had reached a sufficient age to adopt one myself.

"Good morning, Master Buts. What can we offer you?"

"I'd like to see my friend, George Batchelor. I assume he is no longer *Brother* George."

"We have not been dissolved yet, but indeed we no longer think of ourselves as monks, or most of us do not. Please wait here while I fetch him."

The porter heaved himself out of his seat and burrowed down a corridor, like a fleeing mole.

I looked with curiosity through the gateway into the monastery courtyard. With such a narrow angle of view, I could see little, but every so often I would see a young man wearing clothes as rich and as secular as mine, or an elderly monk, still sporting his tonsure to the world and to heaven, and in the old russet robe that would have been his only garment since

boyhood.

After a long time, the porter returned. “I’ll take your horse to the stable, Master Buts,” he said, “and George will come out in a moment”.

I let the porter take the horse’s bridle, and instead of leading her away at once, he stood shuffling and gazing at me as if in expectation of something else. At last I realised that he wanted me t o give him a coin for his trouble.

“I thought this monastery wasn’t dissolute yet,” I said, but I gave him a farthing before he led my horse away.

For a little while I stood waiting alone in the gateway, until a stocky figure in a russet robe strode out into the sunshine on the other side of the courtyard.

“George!” I shouted, and, breaking rules that had stood for eight hundred years, I hurried into the courtyard to greet him. I shall be suspected of Romish tendencies when I tell you that I was glad to see him still wearing the robe and tonsure that all the other monks of our age at St. Anne’s seemed to have discarded.

“Thomas!” he exclaimed. “I thought you were in London.”

“So I was, but I’ve come home in time for Easter.”

“*You* can celebrate Easter, but I can hardly do that. Do you know that St. Anne’s is to be dissolved?”

“I assumed it,” I replied.

“Which means, Thomas, that I’m going to be put out penniless into the world. I suppose that I’ll have to become a Roaring Beggar. Have you heard that new rhyme? ‘Hark, hark, the dogs do bark, the beggars are coming to town.’ The dogs will be barking at me before the spring is out.”

“George,” I said, “come and walk with me outside the monastery for a while”.

I was alarmed by his bitterness.

"Surely," I said, "you must have some means living? With your learning, you could become a schoolmaster, or else you could join me in studying the law. You need never beg."

We walked out into the fresh April grass.

"I don't want to be a teacher or a lawyer. I want to be a monk, and if I can't be a monk in England, I'll be one somewhere else."

"That's close to treason," I warned him.

"Would you rather have me betray England or betray God?"

"Listen, George. I came here to offer you a chance for employment for a short while. Three weeks from now, I'm leaving with a company of scholars and gentlemen on a voyage to America."

I explained the plan to him.

"I'm here to invite you to come along as the expedition's artist and chaplain. Not in that order of importance, of course," I added hastily.

"Thomas, I entered St. Anne's to withdraw from the world of practical action. Now you want me to cross the ocean, and merely to draw clever pictures of wild men and animals and exotic plants. I prefer to go to Flanders and continue the vocation to which God called me."

"Would you have us go without any priest?"

"There are plenty of unemployed monks around who are ordained priests/ Choose another one."

"George, if I can't persuade you by argument, I'll plead with you instead, in the name of our friendship."

"I am a monk. I have renounced all my friends."

"Then why are you out here in the fields, talking to me?"

"We are all subject to weakness."

"Then let me suggest it to you this way, George. We return to England in August, so you would be giving up only four months."

"Thomas, who knows what may happen in England during those four months? I am sure that there were never so many changes in the life of a kingdom in such a short time."

"When we return, you can judge whether you approve of the new England."

I looked around cautiously, not wanting to be overheard encouraging treason.

"You can decide to leave the kingdom at that time just as well as now. You would also have gained the experience of seeing America."

"What would I see there? All the interesting parts of the continent are under Spanish rule, and are forbidden to Englishmen, and the more so since our king deserted Christ. All you will see is rock and forest."

"Ah, but I know at least one man who thinks otherwise," I replied, and I told George about Oliver Dawbeney and his dream of golden cities filled with pyramids and palaces. "We might find great empires like those in Mexico and Peru."

"Yes, and how would we convert the natives, when we didn't know whether we ourselves were Catholics or Lutherans?"

We turned and began walking back to the monastery. George was silent, and his dark still eyes looked high up across the far horizon of our flat Norfolk countryside.

I left him to his thoughts until we were back at the porter's lodge under the gateway.

"Have you come to a decision yet on our voyage?" I asked him, as the corrupt porter noticed me and scurried off to fetch my horse.

"It is a dangerous and pointless scheme. Why should I volunteer myself for a voyage

across the ocean to view some rocks and trees? No, I'll go to Flanders, even if I have to leave our friendship behind."

The porter stumbled up with my horse.

"So be it, George," I said. "The offer still stands, but only until I return to London, because after that I will have to tell Master Hore that he must find another chaplain and artist, which is sure to mean that we will need two men instead of one."

"It is not my responsibility to solve that problem, Thomas," George said. "I wish you good luck, and a safe return. For myself, I have perhaps two or three months to arrange my move to Flanders. Goodbye."

I took my horse's bridle from the clumsy porter. George obviously did not care that the man had heard his plan to forsake England. No doubt there was little profit to be had in denouncing a monk for planning to remove himself a little further from his monastery than the king required.

"Goodbye, George," I said, mounting my horse and turning away from him. I did not look over my shoulder to see whether he was watching me leave.

I went home and began making up a list of articles that would be the most useful to take with me on the ship.

I chose my strongest boots and articles of clothing, a stout knife, and some books that my grandfather had given to me. I had never read them. I made a note to buy a sheet of oilcloth to wrap them in as protection from seawater and rain.

What else? Pens, paper, and ink to write a journal? I decided that I would be sure to run out of ink, and I could hardly expect to find any for sale on the shores of Newfoundland.

That conclusion led me to consider whether I should take any money with me. Eventually I judged that there was no need of it. If we encountered cities as rich as Mexico,

their merchants would be in no shortage of coin, and if we met only ignorant savages, they would have no use for a silver English penny. I decided to take only enough for my needs before and after the voyage.

I planned to leave for London on the Tuesday after Easter, but my preparations were well forward, and I might have gone on the Monday if George Batchelor had not suddenly appeared at our house early that morning.

When the servants called up to me that he had arrived, I rushed downstairs.

George was blinking in the doorway, as though he had been led out of a dark place into the light. Indeed, it must have seemed strange to him to be so far away from St. Anne's for the first time in seven years.

"Come in, George!" I cried. "Hey, bring some meat and beer for him. Come and sit down with me. What's the news?"

"I'm a beggar, Thomas," George replied, his hands firmly gripping the edge of the table. "I have been forced to leave St. Anne's. No pension, of course, for I'm too young, but by the grace of Parliament I can keep my robe, even though it is the property of the Church and not my own. What a joke: I am released from my vow of poverty, and now I find myself poorer than I ever was in my life, poorer even than when my mother died and your father rescued me."

"George," I said, "come with me to America. I'm setting out for London tomorrow.

"I should have joined a mendicant order," George said, clenching his fists. "I throw myself upon your charity."

"This is not charity, it is gainful employment," I told him. "Have you a place to stay tonight? No? Come on, tell me, George. Evidently not. Well, you are the guest of the Buts family for tonight, and tomorrow we'll leave for London."

At the end of the day, when we all sat down to supper, my father asked George to say Grace.

George did so, but almost inaudibly, and then, to my surprise, he got up from the table.

He went up to my father and seized his hand. My father bravely repressed a wince as his hand was crushed in George's powerful grip.

"Sir William," George exclaimed, "the time is coming when you could earn martyrdom only for hearing a true Christian Grace. Never abandon the faith."

We were all silent, not knowing what to say.

George eventually realised that he was close to breaking my father's hand, and he let it go before sitting down at the table again.

My father made an effort to cheer him.

"Some good may come of this, Master Batchelor. I beg your pardon; I should call you 'Sir George', because you are an ordained priest. Anyway, Sir George, men may be more respectful of an English Church than of an Italian one."

"I respect Christ more than I respect the king, Sir William," George replied. "The king cannot set aside my vows as a monk and priest."

Early next morning, George and I set out from Hoxworth towards London. George insisted on wearing his monk's robe, although my mother had offered to have some of my clothes let out to fit him. As we clopped out of the yard, I thought that there was something unseemly and startling in seeing a monk on horseback.

We had no company on our journey, but no robbers attacked us, perhaps because George looked both poor and strong, but the peasants glared at us with great hostility while we were still in Norfolk and then Suffolk. The Church had been the greatest landowner in

these parts for centuries, and had been no merciful and gentle landlord. The common man believed that he would have a better life if the lands that were owned by the Church were put into secular hands, and the peasants were behind the king to a man when he began his policy of dissolving the monasteries.

George ignored the hatred that was directed at him, and mentioned it only once.

"Poor fools, do they think that they will have lower rents and less work under their new landlords? The king cannot reduce prices, and the land must be worked in the same way, or else turned over to sheep."

We spent three days on the roads to London, and we rode in through the city wall by Bishopsgate on the 21st. of April.

I took George to my own lodgings near the Temple.

"Now there are two things we must do," I said. "We must get some practical clothes for you, and then I must introduce you to Master Hore."

Within the hour George was the reluctant possessor of a tunic, breeches, and a strong pair of boots. He put up a fierce argument for keeping his monk's robe until we joined the ship, but I caught him out by asking him whether he had actually sworn a vow to wear a russet robe and maintain a tonsure. In the Church of Rome, these things are matters of custom and tradition, not of ecclesiastical law.

When George was dressed in ordinary clothes, I was struck by his likeness to a labourer. His tonsure would quickly be overgrown by his thick black hair. I foresaw that having the crown of his head shaved by a clumsy sailor on a tossing ship would be a dangerous procedure, and I resolved to make sure that he did not succumb to any longing to take the tonsure again.

While I led George to the Temple, I asked him what he thought of London, now that

he had seen it.

"Only a greater Norwich," he said. "I was frightened by Norwich when I was a small boy and your father first took me to school there. This city does look different, but the poor people –" he lowered his voice – "seem poorer."

Master Hore was in his rooms, with his door open. His terrestrial globe had been restored to its usual place at the end of the table. He was running his finger over a map, as though one of the odd little islands had fallen off the globe onto the map, and he was searching to find it.

I coughed loudly to attract this attention.

"Thomas Buts! I had begun to despair of ever seeing you again in London. May I ask who your companion is?"

"This is George Batchelor, of whom I spoke to you earlier, and he has engaged to serve as our chaplain and artist."

"Very good, Master Batchelor! Or should I call you Sir George, as you are a priest?"

"George, by itself, will serve very well as my name, sir," George replied. "As you see by my tonsure, I am a professed monk as well as a priest."

"Well, no doubt you are glad that the king has freed you from your unholy imprisonment in the superstitions of Rome. The Church of England will find a good use for you after we have returned from our expedition. Thomas, no doubt you have explained everything to George?"

"Indeed, I have," I replied, but it was something of a lie, for I had omitted to tell George about Master Hore's enmity to all things Romish. George was frowning at me, and I thought it best to ask Master Hore about another subject.

"Have you found a ship?"

"Not just one ship, but two ships, Thomas, and they are lying at Gravesend now. We shall be thirty gentlemen in all, and there will be ninety sailors. Here," Master Hore continued, lifting the map and rummaging beneath it, "here is the list that I have made. The larger ship is called the *Trinitie*, which should please our chaplain, and twenty of us will go in it, including myself. The smaller ship is called the *Minion*, and ten gentlemen will sail in her. As to how the crews will be divided, I leave that to Captain Scarwen."

"How did you choose him?" I asked.

"Simple! I was sitting in the Woolsack tavern, talking with some of those who will be our companions, and I was telling them that I had not yet set in hand my search for a ship and captain. At my words, a fellow got up from the nearest table, sat down opposite me, and told me that he was an expert sailing master and navigator, with a fine ship., free to be chartered. We had struck the bargain within five minutes, and Scarwen for his own part found the *Minion* for us when we discovered that the *Trinitie* w as too small to take all those who wanted to go. We are to assemble upon the wharves at Gravesend on the 28th. of April, and sail the same day."

"Will we ride down to Gravesend in a body?" I asked.

"Some gentlemen have chosen to ride there, but I have engaged a boat to take the rest of us down the Thames. That way, we can transport our luggage more easily, and grow accustomed to being on the water. Next Thursday morning, an hour after dawn, is when we shall assemble, a hundred yards below London Bridge."

"Until Thursday, then, Master Hore," I said, and George and I turned and left as Master Hore peered down at his map again.