



# In Destiny's Clutch

By Rafael Sabatini ~

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

## CHAPTER I. CORSAIR OF THE SEAS.

**O**RDINARILY Dragut-Reis—who was dubbed by the Faithful “The Drawn Sword of Islam”—loved Christians as the fox loves geese. But in that fateful summer of 1550 his feelings toward them acquired a far deeper malignancy; they developed into a direct and personal hatred that for intensity was second only to the hatred which the Christians bore Dragut. The allied Christian forces under the direction of their emperor had smoked him out of his stronghold at Mehedia; they had seized that splendid city and were in the act of razing it to the ground as the neighboring Carthage had been razed of old.

Dragut reckoned up his losses with a gloomy and vengeful mind. He had lost his city, and from the eminence of a budding Basha in the act of founding a kingdom and perhaps a dynasty, he had been cast down once more to be a wanderer upon the seas. He had lost three thousand men, and among them the very flower of his redoubtable corsairs; he had lost some twelve thousand Christian slaves, the fruit of many a desperate raid; he had lost his lieutenant and nephew Hisar, who was even now a captive in the hands of his inveterate enemy, Andrea Doria. All this had he lost, and he was naturally embittered.

Yet Dragut was not the man to waste his days

in brooding over what was done. Yesterday and today are but pledges in the hands of destiny. He returned thanks to Allah the Compassionate, the So-Merciful, that he was still alive and free upon the seas with three galleases, twelve galleys, and five brigantines, wherewith to set about making good his losses, and he bent his energetic, resourceful knavish mind to the matter of ways and means.

Meanwhile he had been warned by the Sultan of Constantinople that the Emperor Charles, not content with the mischief he had already done him, had, in letters to the Grand Signior, avowed his intent to pursue to the death “the pirate Dragut, a corsair odious to both God and man.” He knew, moreover, that the emperor had intrusted this task to the greatest seaman of the day, to the terrible admiral of Genoa, Andrea Doria, and the Genoese was already at sea upon his quest.

Now once already had Dragut been captured by the navy of Genoa, and for four years, which he cared but little to remember, he had toiled at an oar on board the galley of Giannettino Doria, the admiral’s nephew. He had known exposure to cold and heat; he had been broiled by the sun and frozen by the rain; he had known aching muscles, hunger, and thirst, and the sores begotten of the oarsman’s bench, and his shoulders were still a crisscross of scars where the bos’n’s whip had lashed him to revive his flagging energies.

All this had he known, and he was not minded to renew the acquaintance. It behooved

him therefore to make ready fittingly to receive the admiral when he should appear. And by way of replenishing his coffers at once, venting a little of his vengeful heat, and marking his contempt for Christian pursuers, he had made a sudden swoop upon the southwestern coast of Sicily.

Beginning at Gergenti, Dragut carried his raid as far north as Marsala, leaving ruin and desolation behind him. At the end of a week he stood off to sea again, with the spoils of six townships and some three thousand picked captives of both sexes. He would teach the infidel Christian emperor to allude to him as "the pirate Dragut, a corsair odious to both God and man"—he would so, by the beard of the Prophet!

He put the captives aboard one of the galleys in charge of his lieutenant, Othmani, and dispatched them straight to Algeria to be sold there in the slave market. With the proceeds Othmani was to lay down fresh keels. Until these should be ready to reenforce his little fleet, Dragut judged it well to avoid encounters with the Genoese admiral, and with this intent he steered a southward course along the coast toward Tripoli.

Toward evening of the day on which Othmani's galley set out alone for Algiers, a fresh breeze sprang up from the north, and blew into the corsair's range of vision a tiny brown-sailed felucca as it might have blown a leaf of autumn. It was hawk-eyed Dragut himself, who, lounging on the high deck of his galley, first sighted this tiny craft.

He pointed it out to Biretta, the renegade Calabrian gunner who was near him. "In the name of Allah," quoth Dragut, "what walnut shell is this that comes so furiously after us?"

Biretta, a massive, sallow fellow, laughed. "The fury is not hers, but of the wind," said he. "She goes where'er it bloweth her. She'll be an Italian craft."

"Then the wind that blows her is the wind of destiny. Haply she'll have news of Italy." Dragut turned on his heel, and gave an order to a turbaned officer on the gangway below.

Instantly the brazen note of a trumpet rang out clear above the creak and dip of oars. As instantly the rowers came to rest, and from the side of each galley six and twenty massive yellow oars stood out, their wet blades glistening in the evening sunlight.

Thus the Moslem fleet waited, rocking gently on the little swell that had arisen, its quality advertised by the red and white ensign displaying a blue crescent that floated from the masthead of Dragut's own galley.

## CHAPTER II.

### WINDS OF DESTINY.

**O**N came the tiny brown-sailed felucca, helplessly driven by what Dragut accounted the winds of destiny. At closer quarters they saw indications of the desperate effort that was being made aboard her to put her about. But they were lubberly fellows who had charge of her, and Dragut was content to wait. At last, when she was in danger of being blown past them, he crossed to meet her. As the long prow ran alongside of her grappling hooks were deftly flung to seize her at mast and gunwale, and but for these she must have been swept away by the oars of the galley.

From the prow Dragut himself, a tall and handsome figure in his gold-embroidered scarlet surcoat that descended to his knees, his snow-white turban heightening the swarthiness of his hawk face with its square-cut black beard, stood to challenge the crew of the felucca.

There were aboard of her six scared knaves, something between lackeys and seamen, whom the corsair's black eyes passed contemptuously over. He addressed himself to a couple who were seated in the stern sheets—a tall and very elegant young gentleman, obviously Italian, and a girl upon whose white, golden-headed loveliness the corsair's bold eyes glowed pleasurably.

"Who are you?" he demanded haughtily in Italian.

The young man answered for the twain, very composedly, as though it were a matter of everyday life with him to be held in the grappling hooks of a Barbary pirate. "My name is Ottavio Brancaleone. I am from Genoa on my way to Spain."

"To Spain?" quoth Dragut, and laughed. "You steer an odd course for Spain, or do you look to find it in Egypt?"

"We have lost our rudder," the gentleman explained, "and were at the mercy of the wind."

"I hope you find it has been merciful," said

Dragut, leering at the girl, who shrank nearer to her companion, fear staring out of her blue eyes. "And your companion, sir, who is she?"

"My—my sister."

"Had you told me different you had been the first Christian I ever knew to speak the truth," said Dragut amiably. "Well, well, it's plain you're not to be trusted to sail a boat of your own. Best come aboard and see if you and your fellows can do better at an oar."

"I'll not trespass on your hospitality," said Brancaleone, with that amazing coolness of his.

"You shall earn it, I promise you," the corsair reassured him. "So come aboard. I am Dragut-Reis."

It pleased his vanity to notice that his name was not without disconcerting effect upon that smooth young gentleman. In the end there was a short, sharp tussle. Dragut flung a half score of his corsairs into the felucca to capture her voyagers, and one of them was stabbed by Brancaleone ere they overpowered him.

The prize proved far less insignificant than at first the corsair had imagined. For in addition to the slaves he had acquired, and the girl, who was fit to grace a sultan's harem, he found a great chest of newly minted ducats that it took six men to heave aboard the galley, and a beautifully chiseled gold coffer, full of gems of price. He found something more. On the inside of this coffer's lid was engraved its owner's name—Amelia Francesca Doria.

Dragut snapped down the lid with a prayer of thanks to Allah the One, and strode into the cabin where the girl was confined. "Madonna Amelia," said he.

She looked up instantly. Obviously it was her name, and the casket was her own.

"Will you tell me what is your kinship with the admiral?" Dragut asked.

"I am his granddaughter, sir," she answered, "and be sure that he will avenge terribly upon you any wrong that is done to me."

Dragut smiled. "We are old friends, the admiral and I," said he, and went out again. A mighty Nubian bearing a torch—for night had now descended—lighted him to the galley's waist, where about her mainmast lay huddled the seven pinioned prisoners.

With the curved toe of his scarlet slipper the

corsair touched Messer Brancaleone. "Tell me, dog," Dragut commanded, "all that you know of Messer Andrea Doria."

"That is soon told," answered Brancaleone. "I know nothing, nor want to."

"You lie, as was to be expected," said Dragut. "For one thing, you know his granddaughter."

Brancaleone blinked and recovered. "True, and several others of his family. But I conceived your question to concern his movements. I know that he is upon the seas, that he is seeking you, that he has sworn to take you alive, and that when he does—as I pray he will—he will so deal with you that you shall implore them of their Christian charity to hang you."

"And that is all you know?" quoth Dragut, entirely unruffled. "You did not peradventure sight his fleet as you were sailing?"

"I did not."

"Do you think that with a match between your fingers you might remember?"

"I might invent," replied the Italian; "but I doubt it. I have told you the truth, Messer Dragut. Torture could but gain you falsehood."

Dragut looked searchingly into that comely young face, then turned away as if satisfied. But as he was departing Messer Brancaleone called him back. And when he spoke now the Italian's tone and manner were entirely changed. His imperturbability, real or assumed, had all departed. Anxiety amounting almost to terror sounded in his voice.

"What fate do you reserve for Madonna Amelia?" he asked.

Dragut looked down at the man's pale face, and smiled a little. He had no particular rancor against his prisoner. On the whole he was inclining to admiration for the fellow's almost philosophic courage. At the same time there was no room for sentiment in the heart of the corsair. He was quite pitiless.

"Our lord the sublime Suleyman," said he, entirely without malice, "is as keen a judge of beauty as any man living. I account the girl to be a worthy gift even to the exalted of Allah; so I shall keep her safe against my next voyage to Constantinople."

And then Brancaleone's little lingering self-possession left him utterly. From his writhing lips

came a stream of vituperation, which continued even after the Nubian had struck him a blow upon the mouth and Dragut had taken his departure.

### CHAPTER III.

#### WHEN THE GALLEYS CAME.

**N**EXT day a slave on Dragut's galley having been taken ill at his oar, the wretch was unshackled and heaved overboard, and Brancaleone, stripped to the skin, was chained in the fellow's empty place. There were seven men to each oar, and Brancaleone's six companions were all Christians and all white—or had been before exposure had tanned them to the color of mahogany. Of these, three were Italians, two Spaniards, and one Frenchman. All were grimy and unkempt, and it was with a shudder that the delicately nurtured Genoese gentleman wondered if he were destined to become as they.

Up and down the gangway between the rowers' benches walked two Moslem bos'ns, armed with long whips of bullock hide, and it was not long ere one of them, considering that Brancaleone was not putting his share of effort into his task, sent that cruel lash to raise a burning wheal upon his tender flesh.

He was sparingly fed with his half-brutalized companions upon dried dates and figs, and he was given a little tepid water to drink when he thirsted. He slept in his shackles on the rowers' bench, which was but some four feet wide, and despite the sheepskins with which the bench was padded it was not long before the friction of his movements began to chafe and blister his flesh.

In the scorching noontide of the second day he collapsed fainting upon his oar. He was unshackled and dragged out upon the gangway. There a bucket of water was flung over him. It revived him, and the too-swift-healing action of the salt upon his seared flesh was a burning agony to him. He was put back to his oar again with a warning that if he permitted himself the luxury of swooning a second time he would be given the entire ocean in which to revive.

On the third day they sighted land, and toward evening the galleys threaded their way one by one through the shoals of the Boca de Cantara into the spacious lagoon on the northeast side of

the Island of Jerbah, and there came to rest. It was Dragut's intent to lie snug in that remote retreat until Othmani should be ready with the reinforcements that were to enable the corsair to take the seas once more against the admiral of Genoa.

But it would seem that already the admiral was closer upon his heels than he had supposed, and that trackless as are the ocean ways, yet Andrea Doria had by some mysterious means contrived to gather information as he came that had kept him upon the invisible spoor of his quarry.

There was not a doubt that the folk on that ravaged Sicilian seaboard would be eager to inform the redoubtable admiral of the direction in which the Moslem galleys had faded out of sight. Perhaps even that empty felucca left tossing upon the tideless sea had served as an index to the way the corsairs had taken, and perhaps from the mainland, from Monastir, or one of the other cities now in Christian hands, a glimpse of Dragut's fleet had been caught, and Doria had been warned.

Be that as it may, not a week had Dragut been moored at Terbah when one fine morning brought a group of friendly islanders with the astounding news that a fleet of galleys was descending upon the island from the north.

The news took Dragut ashore in a hurry with a group of officers and from the narrow spur of land at the mouth of the harbor he surveyed the advancing ships. What already he had more than suspected became absolute certainty. Two and twenty royal galleys were steering straight for the Boca de Cantara, the foremost flying Andrea Doria's own ensign.

Back to his fleet went Dragut for cannon and slaves, and so feverishly did they toil under the lash of his venomous tongue and of his bos'ns' whips, that within an hour he had erected a battery at the harbor mouth and fired a salute straight into the Genoese as they were in the very act of dropping anchor. Thereupon the galleys of Doria stood off out of range, and hung there, well content to wait, knowing that the fox was trapped, that the sword of Islam was likely to be sheathed at last, and that all that was now required on their part was patience.

Forthwith the jubilant Doria sent word to the emperor that he held Dragut fast, and he

dispatched messengers to the viceroys of Sicily and Naples asking for reinforcements with which, if necessary, to force the issue. He meant this time to leave nothing to chance.

Dragut on his side employed the time in fortifying the Boca de Cantara. A fort arose there, growing visibly under the eyes of the Genoese, and provoking the amusement of that fierce veteran Doria. Sooner or later Dragut must decide to come forth from his bottle-necked refuge, and the longer he deferred it the more overwhelming would be the numbers assembled to destroy him.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"BETIDE WHAT MAY."

NEVER since Giannettino Doria had surprised him on the road of Goialatta off the coast of Corsica, on that famous occasion when he was made prisoner, had Dragut found himself in so desperately tight a corner. He sat on the deck of his galley, muttering imprecations against the Genoese with that astounding and far-reaching fluency in which the Moslem is without rival upon earth. He pronounced authoritatively upon the shamelessness of Doria's mother, and the inevitably shameful destiny of his daughters. He called perfervidly upon Allah to rot the bones and destroy the house of his archenemy, and he foretold how dogs would of a certainty desecrate the admiral's grave. Then, seeing that Allah remained disdainfully aloof, he rose up one day in a mighty passion, and summoned his officers.

"This skulking here will not avail us," he blazed at them, as if it were by their contriving that he was trapped. "By delay we but increase our peril. What is written is written. Allah has bound the fate of each man about his neck. Betide what may, tonight we take to the open sea."

"And by morning you'll have found the bottom of it." drawled a voice from one of the oars.

Dragut, who was standing on the gangway between the rowers' benches, whipped around with a snarl upon the speaker. He found himself gazing into the languid eyes of Messer Brancalone. The rest of the last few days had restored the Italian's vigor, and certain thoughts that he had lately been indulging had restored his

courage.

"Are you weary of life?" wondered the corsair. "Shall I have you hanged before we go to meet your friends out yonder?"

"To do one or the other," said Brancalone, "would be to render absolute the conviction which has been growing upon me during this week past."

"And what may that be?"

"That you're a dull fellow when all is said, Messer Dragut. Hang me, and you hang the only man in all your fleet who can show you the way out of this trap."

Dragut stared between anger and amazement. "You can show me a way out of this trap?" he echoed. "What way may that be?"

"Strike off my fetters, restore me my garments, and give me proper food, and I will discuss it with you."

Dragut glowered at him. "We have a shorter way to make men speak," he said.

Brancalone smiled and shook his head. "You think so? Another of your delusions."

It was odd what a power of conviction dwelt in his imperturbable tones. The corsair issued an order, and turned away. A half hour later, Messer Brancalone, nourished, washed, and clothed, looking once more like the elegant Italian gentleman who had first been hoisted aboard the galley, stepped on to the deck, where Dragut-Reis awaited him in some impatience.

Seated cross-legged upon a gorgeous silken divan that was wrought in green and blue and gold, the handsome corsair combed his square black beard with fretful fingers. Behind him, stark-naked save for his white loin cloth, stood his gigantic Nubian, his body oiled until it shone like ebony, armed with a great curved scimitar.

"Now, sir," growled Dragut, "what is this precious plan of yours—briefly?" His tone was contemptuous.

"You begin where we should end," said the imperturbable Genoese. "I owe you no favors Messer Dragut, and I bear you no affection that I should make you a free gift of your life and liberty. My eyes have seen something to which yours are blind, and my brain has conceived something of which yours is quite incapable. These things, sir, are for sale. Before I part with them we must agree upon the price."

Dragut stared from under scowling brows.

He could scarce believe that the world held so much impudence. "And what price do you suggest?" he snarled, by way of humoring the Genoese.

"Why, as to that, since I offer you life and liberty, it is but natural that I should claim my own life and liberty in return, and similarly the liberty of Madonna Amelia and of my servants whom you captured; also it is but natural that I should require the restoration of the money and jewels you have taken from us, and since you have deprived us of our felucca, it is no more than proper that you should equip us with a vessel in which to pursue the journey which you interrupted.

"Considering the time we have lost in consequence of this interruption," Brancalone went on, "it is but just that you should make this good as far as possible by presenting me with a craft that is capable of the utmost speed. I will accept a galley of six and twenty oars, manned by a proper complement of Christian slaves."

"And is that all?" roared Dragut.

"No," said Brancalone quietly. "That is but the restitution due to me. We come now to the price of the service I am to render you. When you were Giannettino Doria's prisoner, Barbarossa paid for you, as all the world knows, a ransom of three thousand ducats. I will be more reasonable."

"Will you so?" snorted Dragut. "By the splendor of Allah, you'll need to be."

"I will accept one thousand ducats."

"May Allah blot thee out, thou impudent son of shame!" cried the corsair, filled with fury.

"You compel me to raise the price to fifteen hundred ducats," said Brancalone smoothly. "I must be compensated for abuse since I cannot take satisfaction for it as between one Christian gentleman and another."

It was good for Dragut that his feelings suddenly soared to an intensity beyond expression, else might the price have been raised even beyond the famous ransom that Barbarossa had paid. Mutely he stood glowering, clenching and unclenching his hands; than he half turned to his Nubian swordsman. "Ali—" he began.

Brancalone once more cut in. "Ah, wait," said he. "I pray you calm yourself. Remember how you stand, and that Andrea Doria holds you trapped. Do nothing that will destroy your only

chance. Time enough to call in Ali and have my head hacked off when I have failed."

That speech arrested Dragut's anger in full flow. He wheeled upon the Genoese once more. "You accept that alternative?"

Brancalone smiled with almost pitying amusement. "Why not? I have no slightest fear of failure. I can show you how to win clear of this trap and make the admiral the laughingstock of the world."

"Speak, then; let me know your plan!" cried Dragut fiercely.

"If I do so before you have agreed to my terms, then I shall have nothing left to sell."

Angrily Dragut turned aside, and strode to the taffrail. He looked across the shimmering blue water to the fortifications at the harbor mouth; with the eyes of his imagination he looked beyond at the fleet of Genoa riding out yonder in patient conviction that it held its prey.

The price that Brancalone asked was outrageous—a galley and some two hundred Christian slaves to row it and fifteen hundred ducats. In all it amounted to fully as much as the ransom that Barbarossa had paid for him, yet Dragut must pay it, or fall into the power of his Christian foes. He came to reflect that he would pay it gladly enough to be out of this tight corner.

He came about again. He spoke of torture once more, but in a half-hearted sort of way; for he did not himself believe that it would be effective with a man of Brancalone's temper.

Brancalone laughed at the threat, and shrugged his shoulders. "You may as profitably hang me, Messer Dragut," he said, "for your infidel barbarities will but seal my lips for all time."

"We might torture the woman," said Dragut the ingenious.

Brancalone, on the words, turned white to the lips; but it was the pallor of bitter, heart-searing resolve, not the pallor of such fear as Dragut had hoped to awaken. He advanced a step, his imperturbability all gone, and he sent his words into the face of the corsair with the fierceness of a cornered wild cat.

"Attempt it," said he, "and as God's my witness I leave you to your fate at the hands of Genoa—ay, though my heart should burst with the pain of my silence. I am a man, Messer Dragut;

never doubt it."

"I do not," said Dragut, his piercing black eyes upon that set white face. "I agree to your terms. Show me a way out of Doria's clutches, and you shall have all that you have asked for."

## CHAPTER V. REALLY SIMPLE.

**T**REMBLING still from his recent emotion, Brancaleone hoarsely bade the corsair call up his officers and repeat his words before them. "And you shall make oath upon this matter," he added. "Men say of you that you are a faithful Moslem. I mean to put it to the test."

Dragut, now all eagerness to know what plan was stirring in his prisoner's brain, unable to brook further suspense in this affair, called up his officers, and before them all, taking Allah to witness, he made oath upon the beard of the Prophet that if Brancaleone could show him deliverance, he on his side would recompense the Genoese to the extent demanded.

Thereafter Dragut and Brancaleone went ashore, with no other attendant but the Nubian swordsman. It was the Genoese who led the way, not toward the fort, as Dragut had expected, but in the opposite direction. Arrived at the northernmost curve of that almost circular lagoon, where the ground was swampy. Brancaleone paused. He pointed across a strip of shallow land, that was no more than a half mile or so in width, to the blue-green sea beyond. Part of this territory was swamp, and part sand; vegetation there was of the scantiest; some clumps of reeds, an odd date palm, its crest rustling slightly in the breeze, and nothing else.

"It is really very simple," said the Italian. "Yonder lies your way."

As he spoke, a red-legged stork rose from the edge of the marsh, and went circling overhead. Dragut's face was purple with rage. He deemed that this smooth fellow had brought him there to make mock of him.

"Are my galleys winged like that stork, thou fool?" he answered passionately. "Or are they wheeled like chariots that I can sail them over dry land."

Brancaleone looked at him in stupefaction. "I

protest," said he, "that for a man of your reputation for shrewdness, you fill me with amazement. I said you were a dull fellow. I little dreamed how dull. Nay, now, suppress your rage. Truth is a very healing draft, and you have need of it. I compute now that aboard your ships there will be, including slaves, some three thousand men. No doubt you could press another thousand from the island into your service. How long would it take four thousand men to dig a channel deep enough to float your shallow galleys through that strip of land?"

Dragut's fierce eyes flickered as though he had been menaced with a blow. "By Allah!" he ejaculated, and gripped his beard. "By the splendor of Allah!"

"In a week the thing were easily done," Brancaleone resumed, "and meanwhile your fort will hold the admiral in play and mask your labors. Then, one dark night, you slip through this channel, and stand away to the south, so that by sunrise you shall have vanished beyond the sky line, leaving the admiral to guard an empty trap."

Dragut laughed aloud, in almost childlike glee, and otherwise signified his delight by the vehemence with which he testified to the unity of Allah. Suddenly he checked, and his eyes narrowed as they rested upon Brancaleone. "'Tis a scurvy trick you play your lady's grandsire!" said he.

The Genoese shrugged and, smiled deprecatingly. "Every man for himself, Messer Dragut. We understand each other, I think. 'Tis not for love of you I do this thing."

"I would it were," said the corsair, with an odd sincerity, and thereafter, as they returned to the galleys, it was seen that Dragut's arm was about the shoulders of the infidel, and that he spoke with him as with a brother.

The fact is that Dragut, fired with admiration of Brancaleone's resourcefulness, was cast down at the thought that so fine a spirit should of necessity be destined to go down to the pit. He spoke to him now of the glories of Islam, and of the future that must await a gentleman of his endowments in the ranks of the Moslem; he had of a sudden conceived so great an affection for him that he was filled with the desire to convert him to the true faith. But this was a matter in which Brancaleone was politely obdurate, and

Dragut had not the time to devote to the conversation, greatly as he desired it. There was the matter of that canal to engage him.

Brancaleone's instructions were diligently carried out. Daily the fort at the Boca de Cantara would belch forth shot at the Genoese navy, which stood well out of range. To the admiral this was but the barking of a dog that dared not come within biting reach, and the waste of ammunition roused his contempt of that pirate Dragut whom he held at his mercy.

There came a day, however, when the fort was silent; it was followed by another day of silence, in the evening of which one of the admiral's officers suggested that all might not be well. Doria agreed with him.

"All is not at all well with that dog Dragut." Andrea Doria laughed in his white beard. "He wants us within range of his guns. The ruse is a little too obvious."

And so the great Genoese fleet remained carefully out of range of the empty fort, what time Dragut himself was some scores of miles away, speeding as fast as his slaves could row for the archipelago and the safety of the Dardanelles. In the words of the Spanish historian, Marmol, who has chronicled the event—although many of the details here recorded escaped his knowledge—"Dragut left Messer Andrea Doria 'with the dog to hold.'"

Brancaleone accompanied the Moslem fleet at first, though now aboard the galley which Dragut had given him in accordance with their agreement, and with him sailed the lovely Amelia Francesca Doria, his chest of gold, the jewels, and the fifteen hundred ducats that Dragut, grimly stifling his reluctance, had paid the Genoese.

On the second day of their voyage, the corsair was able to replace the vessel granted to Brancaleone. They met a royal galley from Naples, manned by Spaniards, and rowed by Moslem slaves. She was speeding to Andrea Doria with news that the viceroy was sending reinforcements. There was a sharp, short fight, and Messer Dragut added her to his fleet, liberating the Moslem slaves, and replacing them by the Spaniards who had manned the vessel.

Some hours later, Messer Brancaleone and

the corsair captain parted company with many expressions of mutual good will, and the Genoese put about and steered a northwesterly course for the coast of Spain.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THAT IMPUDENT GENOESE.

IT was some months ere Dragut learned the true inwardness of Messer Brancaleone's conduct. He had the story from a Genoese captive, captain of a carack which the corsair scuttled in the Straits of Messina. The fellow's name chanced to be Brancaleone, upon learning which Dragut inquired if he were kin to one Ottavio Brancaleone, who had gone to Spain with the admiral's granddaughter.

"He is my cousin," the man answered.

And Dragut now learned that in the teeth of the opposition of the whole Doria family, the irrepressible Brancaleone had carried off Madonna Amelia. The admiral had news of it as he was putting to sea, and it was in pursuit not only of Dragut, but also of the runagates, that he had come south so far as Jerbah, having reason more than to suspect that they were aboard one of Dragut's galleys. The admiral had sworn to hang Brancaleone from his yardarm ere he returned to port, and his bitterness at the trick Dragut had played him was increased by the reflection that Brancaleone, too, had got clear away.

Dragut was very thoughtful when he heard that story. "And to think," said he, "that I paid that unconscionable dog fifteen hundred ducats and gave him my best galley manned by two hundred Christian slaves for rendering himself as great a service as ever he was rendering me!"

He bore no malice, however. On the contrary, his admiration grew for that impudent Genoese, the only Christian who had ever bested Dragut in a bargain, and if he had a regret it was that so shrewd a spirit should abide in the body of an infidel. "In the service of Islam," he was wont to say, "such a man as Brancaleone might have gone far indeed. But Allah is all-knowing."