

I

Dreams of Glory



THE NAME JOHN SMITH IS SAID to be the commonest of English appellations. The man who received it at his baptism in 1580, in the little village of Willoughby-by-Alford, Lincolnshire, spent his life trying to distinguish himself from all the others. He succeeded, and today when people hear his name with the title he earned for himself—*Captain* John Smith—they recognize it. “Oh, *that* John Smith,” they say, usually adding, “the one who was in love with Pocahontas.” The true John Smith, unfortunately, has been subsumed by the legend that he himself helped to create.

The church in which he was baptized, on January 9, 1580 (1579 in that era’s calendar, in which the new year did not begin until March), was dedicated to Saint Helen, the patron saint of travelers. She certainly blessed the infant at the baptismal font that day, for during his lifetime he would travel to four continents. Wanderlust may have been a family trait, because both his parents were newcomers to Lincolnshire, a marshy and isolated county in the east of England. In an era when few people ever ventured more than twenty miles from their birthplace, George Smith, John’s father, had moved from Lancashire, more than 140 miles away. Likewise, Alice Rickard, George’s wife, had her roots in Great Heck, Yorkshire, in north-central England. What brought them to Lincolnshire is unknown, but in George’s case it probably was the opportunity to possess land.

George Smith must have been an ambitious man, for he not only farmed and grazed animals on land of his own, but he also rented out tenements, or houses, to others. In addition, his agricultural enterprises were extensive enough to enable him to lease land from Peregrine Bertie, Lord Willoughby, the largest landholder in the area. Though the village of Willoughby-by-Alford had been the source of the noble lord's title, he had recently built a grand manor house in Eresby, several miles away. So in Willoughby itself, a village of perhaps three hundred to four hundred souls, George Smith was probably the wealthiest person, as the inventory of his possessions in his will indicates.

Yet he was ranked as a "yeoman," slightly below a "gentleman" in the social hierarchy of the time. The important difference, as Sir Thomas Overbury wrote in describing the English yeoman in 1615, was, "Even though he be master, he says not to his servants 'go to the field,' but 'let us go.'" A gentleman was known by his clean, soft hands, for he did no physical labor. George's son John—though he continually showed his disdain for those who would not work—nevertheless yearned for the distinction and respect that gentlemen's sons had from birth.

In this quest, young John had a model: a yeoman's son, like himself, who rose to greatness and wealth through ambition and achievement. This was Sir Francis Drake, who in the year after John Smith's birth completed the first English circumnavigation of the world, a voyage that was primarily undertaken to loot Spanish ships laden with treasure in gold and silver from the Americas. Drake's haul is estimated to have been worth half a million pounds, easily the equivalent of a *billion* dollars in today's money.

The lion's share of this loot went to Queen Elizabeth I, who showed her gratitude by coming aboard Drake's ship, the *Golden Hind*, moored at Deptford on the Thames near London. While Londoners crowded along the docks to watch, Elizabeth dubbed Drake "our golden knight," raising a gilded sword to make him Sir Francis.

An honor like that seldom came to the son of a yeoman, and young John Smith certainly regarded the world-circling Drake as

an inspiration. The sea was never far from the thoughts of those who lived in Willoughby-by-Alford, for much of the surrounding land had originally been marsh, which the villagers had reclaimed for agriculture by draining it and then building dikes that kept it from flooding. Regular maintenance of those dikes—probably a communal task—was a constant reminder of the power of the sea only six miles away. John Smith certainly assisted in this work from an early age. As night fell and the villagers started for home, John would have seen the eerie will-o'-the-wisps, swamp gas that briefly ignited, deceiving and frightening the unwary. He became accustomed to them, resisting the teasing of older boys who wanted to scare him. Those who knew John later, both as friend or enemy, attested that he was a man who seldom showed fear.

Elizabeth had been queen of England for twenty-two years when John Smith was born, and she would reign for another twenty-three. The era known as the Elizabethan Age was a time when England took its place as one of the great European powers. Exports of the nation's principal product, wool, increased, bringing wealth to some. Culturally, it was a golden age of drama in which Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Jonson produced works that have survived the centuries since. When Elizabeth declared in 1559 that England would be officially Protestant, she incurred the enmity of the Catholic countries, primarily Spain. From that point on the two nations would compete commercially and politically, barely avoiding open warfare in a kind of sixteenth-century cold war. Spain had prospered in part because of its New World colonies and had virtually declared America its own territory, to be shared only with its neighbor Portugal. The queen had not dared to challenge Spain openly by declaring war, but she had granted "letters of marque" that gave a cover of legality to the activities of private captains like Drake and Sir John Hawkins who attacked and plundered Spanish ships at sea. To the Spaniards, there was little difference between these "privateers" and pirates, and by 1588 Spain was ready to take action against England.

When John was eight years old, a threat appeared from the sea: an armada of warships sent by Spain to crush once and for all

the upstart nation of Protestant heretics whose seafarers had harassed Spanish shipping for most of Elizabeth's reign. King Philip II ordered the governor of the Spanish Netherlands, the Duke of Parma, to invade England the following spring. To move Parma's thirty thousand troops from the Netherlands, Philip would send a fleet of warships and transports up the English Channel to the port of Dunkirk.

It did not take the English long to learn of Philip's intentions, and Elizabeth raised a fleet of her own to defend the Channel against the Spanish Armada. All of the legendary sailors of her age were involved in the preparations—Drake, of course, and Martin Frobisher, who had made several attempts to find a north-west passage through America to Asia, and John Hawkins, whose exploits as a privateer were as renowned as Drake's.

Drake was now an admiral, second-in-command of the English fleet. Some thought his abilities qualified him to be the supreme commander, but Elizabeth's policy was to appoint only men of high birth to such positions. The fleet was thus under the command of Lord Howard, though Howard had the good sense to listen to Drake's freely given advice. (At least Howard was a navy man. Using much the same logic as Elizabeth, King Philip had entrusted his armada to the Duke of Medina Sidonia, a land-lubber who protested, "I know by my small experience afloat that I soon become seasick, and always catch cold.")

Preparations for England's defense took place on land and sea. All along the southwest coast, scouts gathered woodpiles that would be set on fire as soon as the Spanish fleet was sighted. Spreading up the coast from bonfire to bonfire, the signals would alert the English ships waiting in the Channel. Even in Lincolnshire, up on England's North Sea coast, people readied for the invasion, for no one knew where the Duke of Parma's troops might come ashore. Like many other places, Lincolnshire raised a volunteer force of "trained and untrained men" who prepared to defend their country with matchlock muskets, pikes, and pitchforks. Eight-year-old John Smith must have regarded it as the most exciting year of his young life.

The Armada appeared off the Lizard, the southernmost point of the British Isles, on the afternoon of July 29, and an epic

seven-day battle ensued along the south coast of England. The English were getting the better of it, but eventually the continual bombardments left both sides without enough powder or cannonballs to continue. Though Medina Sidonia managed to get his fleet to Calais, France, a mere twenty miles from Dunkirk, he was never able to rendezvous with the Duke of Parma and the invasion force the Armada had come to protect. With supplies running low, Medina Sidonia decided to turn north and return home by circling around the top of the British Isles, instead of trying to head back through the Channel the way he had come. He had no way of knowing that storms and shoals would be far more destructive than the English fleet; in rounding Britain, he would lose half his fleet and turn the expedition into a colossal disaster. Only about a third of the twenty-seven thousand men who left Spain with the Armada ever saw home again.

Communications were slow at best in those days. Even after the battle between the two fleets was over, the English were not certain they had won—indeed, rumors spread on the Continent that the Spaniards were the victors. Certainly the ragtag defense force formed by the people of Lincolnshire would have maintained its guard at the shore. Boys like young John Smith might have served as lookouts—and in any case the temptation to catch a glimpse of the sails of the fearsome Armada would likely have been too great for any boy to resist. In the end, Lincolnshire rejoiced as the news of the fate of the Armada gradually became known.

To most Englishmen and Englishwomen, the arrival of the Armada was a short-lived crisis, not to be compared with the threat to their livelihoods posed by what historians call the enclosure movement. This was the burning economic issue that haunted Englishmen from the sixteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth. Traditionally, the rural population had carried on subsistence farming on strips of land in the common fields, for which they paid their landlords in kind, or produce. Herds of sheep and cattle also grazed on common land. But beginning in about the thirteenth century, some landholders—prosperous

yeomen as well as lords—began to consolidate their holdings through purchase or trade, enclosing them with hedges or fences. At first this may have been done to utilize more efficient methods of farming. But as wool became England's largest and most profitable export product (sent to the Netherlands where it was made into fine cloth), landholders started to turn their fields into pasturage for sheep—and sheepherding required far fewer workers than farming. Little by little, the small tenant farmers saw the common land of their villages fenced off. Often they were forced by economic necessity to sell their land rights to yeomen, who were notorious for their acquisitiveness.

John Smith, growing up, witnessed the results. Stripped of their land, the dispossessed farmers looked for work, and when they were unable to find it either relied on the charity of the local parish, became beggars, or turned to thievery. Sir Thomas More, author of *Utopia* and lord chancellor of England before Henry VIII executed him, described those who “must needs depart away, poor, silly, wretched souls, men, women, husbands, wives, fatherless children, widows, woeful mothers, with their young babes. . . . Away they trudge . . . finding no place to rest in.” Many headed for London, where the population rose drastically, despite chronically overcrowded conditions and the plagues that regularly wracked its population.

Earlier, the Roman Catholic monasteries had distributed food and given shelter to those who had none. After Henry made his break with Rome and dissolved the monasteries, it became clear that the state itself must take a hand in providing for those unable to help themselves, and Parliament began to pass a series of Poor Laws. Under Henry VIII's first two children to take the throne, Edward VI and Mary, the government appointed collectors of alms to go throughout the realm and raise voluntary contributions for the destitute. It also started to license poor folk to help themselves by begging. Those measures failed. By 1572, the fifteenth year of Elizabeth's reign, Parliament found that the kingdom was overrun “with rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars . . . by means whereof daily happeneth horrible murders, thefts, and other great outrages.” So the government appointed

“overseers of the poor” with the power to assess the local parishes to raise funds to provide work for those who could find none elsewhere. Refusing the offer of work was made a punishable offense. Anyone over the age of fourteen who was convicted of wandering or begging was to be “grievously whipped and burnt through the gristle of the right ear with a hot iron of the compass of an inch about.” The penalty for conviction of a third offense was death.

This was the world in which John Smith spent his youth, and years later when he reached America, with its apparently limitless expanses, he would not forget the misery he had seen, the grinding poverty that afflicted those with no land.

Poverty was not a personal concern for Smith. He lived in one of the largest homes in Willoughby-by-Alford, adorned with painted wall hangings. He slept on a featherbed, rather than straw. His father, George, was ambitious for his eldest son—perhaps as ambitious as the “typical” yeoman described by Sir Thomas Smith, secretary to the earl of Essex, in 1583: “[They] commonly live welthilie, keepe good houses, do their businesse, and travaile to get riches . . . by these meanes do come to such wealth, that they are able and daily doe buy the lands of unthriftie gentlemen, and after setting their sonnes to the schools, to the Universities, to the lawe of the Realme or otherwise leaving them sufficient landes whereon they may labour, doe make their said sonnes by these meanes gentlemen.”

When John, at the age of six or seven, went to an “ABC school” in the nearby market town of Alford, his father probably had in mind that he was placing his son on the road to becoming a gentleman. At Alford, John learned to write English and some Latin, along with elementary mathematics. Repetition and memorization were the standard teaching methods, and students practiced composition and penmanship by writing letters. The little school, founded with a bequest from a merchant in 1565, went no farther than providing the basics. Most of those who attended probably needed to know only what was necessary for conducting business, calculating profit and loss, buying and selling livestock, seed, and their own harvests.

So it was a significant step forward when John continued his education by entering the boarding school at the larger town of Louth, some twelve miles from his home. Officially known as the King Edward VI Grammar School, the school prepared its students to enter Cambridge, Oxford, or the Inns of Court, which was the entry to a career in law or government. At Louth, Smith encountered the sons of gentlemen and even nobles. Perhaps he was made to feel his social inferiority, and there his lifelong refusal to show “proper” deference to those higher up the scale made its first appearance. Red-haired and notably short, he must have learned early the art of fisticuffs. Certainly none of his teachers or fellow students would have guessed that four hundred years later, a mural at the school would celebrate John Smith as one of Louth’s most illustrious pupils.

The King Edward VI Grammar School was a particularly strict institution. Its seal bore the legend (in Latin, from Proverbs 13:24): “He that spareth the rod hateth his son.” To emphasize the practical application of the message, a schoolroom scene was depicted on the seal, quaintly described by an early-twentieth-century English historian: “A stalwart pedagogue [is] seated with his legs apart, and on his left knee a boy; the pedagogue’s left hand is holding up the boy’s garment and baring the parts below the middle, on which a mighty birch erect in the pedagogue’s right hand is about to fall. The boy’s hands are clasped in a vain appeal for mercy.”

Corporal punishment—in the form of “continually and terrible whipping”—was the usual order of things in Tudor grammar schools. William Bedell, another yeoman’s son like Smith but later a respected bishop, attended a school at Grantry in the 1580s. His son recalled that Bedell had “such a love for learning that no harshness of his master could [discourage it]. . . . [One] time he received such a blow from his choleric master that he . . . had one side of his head so bruised that the blood gushed out of his ear and his hearing on that side was so impaired that he became . . . wholly deaf as to that ear.”

Smith must have had a difficult time accepting such punishments. More than most boys he had dreams of the world outside



The seal of Louth Grammar School, which John Smith attended in the 1580s. The school was founded in 1552, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth's half brother, Edward VI. The depiction of a master whipping a student indicates the school's philosophy of proper educational method.

the classroom; as he recalled, his mind was “even then set upon brave adventures.” When he was thirteen, he sold (using, like Julius Caesar, the third person to refer to himself) “his satchell, bookes, and all he had, intending secretly to get to Sea.” His plans, that time, were thwarted—how, he doesn't tell us. In any event, he returned to school, and no doubt endured a particularly severe beating for his vain attempt.

Smith tells us that his parents died that same year, and that “his father's death stayed him” from his intention to become a sailor. Contemporary records, however, show that Smith's father did not die until Smith was sixteen, and his mother lived on for some years, remarrying less than a year after her husband's death. What does it say about a man that he forgot when his parents died, and ended his mother's life prematurely—at least in memory? Considering that Smith was never to form a romantic attachment to any woman, it appears significant. Oddly, the women he encountered always seemed to have served as saviors, not lovers—for Pocahontas was not his only rescuer.

It is not clear how long Smith stayed in school after his attempt to run away. Two years later, when he was fifteen, his father apprenticed him to Thomas Sendall, of King's Lynn, in Norfolk, southeast of Lincolnshire across the shallow bay called the Wash. Sendall was, as even Smith admitted, "the greatest merchant of all those parts." This was an excellent opportunity for the young man, and indicates that his father must have had important contacts beyond the local village. It suggests that even as a young man, John Smith may have already attracted the notice of more powerful men—those who could have helped him if he had been the sort of person to want a conventional career.

Apprentice or no, young John still yearned for glory at sea, like the honors won by Drake. He hoped his master would send him on a trading voyage, for Sendall had an import-export trade with the Continent. A year after starting his apprenticeship, however, Smith still found himself doing work he loathed: tallying inventories and cargoes, preparing bills, checking shipments both incoming and outgoing. Each ship that sailed from King's Lynn down the estuary of the Great Ouse River, heading out to sea, carried John Smith's dreams with it—but not the young man himself.

Then, in 1596, his father died. In his will, George Smith downplayed his importance, describing himself as the "poore tenant" of Lord Willoughby. Before mentioning his own family, George left Lord Willoughby "as a token of my dewtifull good will the best of my two yeares old colts." A gift for one's lord was customary—Lord Willoughby himself left "a cup of gold to the value of a hundred pounds" to Queen Elizabeth—but George Smith certainly wanted to ensure Willoughby's continued benevolence toward his children, who included a son and a daughter younger than John. George left his farm to his wife, with the proviso that should she marry again it would pass to his eldest son. (Within a year, when the inventory of George Smith's household goods was taken, Alice Smith had indeed remarried.) John also received seven acres of pasture land, along with his father's admonition: "I chardge and command [him] to honoure and love my foresaide good Lord Wiloughbie duringe his lyfe."

John Smith would follow that advice, to his future benefit, but the possession of a farm and pasture land—a good start in the world for most young men of his time—could not entice him to follow in his father’s footsteps. He had no desire to be a farmer. Instead, his father’s death and his mother’s remarriage freed him to follow a different path.

Because Smith was not yet of age, guardians were named to take charge of his property and money. We know what he thought of them because he wrote, with a touch of sarcasm, “They liberally gave him (but out of his owne estate) ten shillings to be rid of him,” and added, with more than a touch of self-pity, “Such oft is the share of fatherlesse children.”

But the guardians could not prevent John from leaving his apprenticeship. Apparently soon after his father’s death, Smith went to France, where he joined a company of English soldiers, with whom he had his first taste of combat. Queen Elizabeth had sent military forces to the Continent in 1585 to assist the Protestant Dutch in their fight for independence from Spain. Four years later, she also gave military aid to the forces of the Protestant claimant to the throne of France, Henry of Navarre.

Though Smith served in both the Netherlands and France for three or four years, he uncharacteristically left no detailed account of his activities. He failed, evidently, to win the glory he sought. His experiences more likely resembled those of Thomas Raymond, another Englishman who fought in the Netherlands some three decades later. For the average foot soldier, conditions had changed little since Smith’s time:

“One night I had nothing to keep me from the cold wet ground but a little bundle of wet dried flax . . . and so with my boots full of water and wrapped up in my wet cloak I lay as round as a hedgehog and at peep of day looked like a drowned rat. . . . And truly, by what I have seen and felt, I cannot but think that the life of a private or common soldier is the most miserable in the world. . . . Soon after our return to garrison to good lodging and diet, many of our soldiers fell into sicknesses and some died. Myself had a huge boil broke out on the inside of one of my thighs from which issued such abundance of filthy matter that I

suppose it cleared me from sickness. . . . I had no great fancy to this kind of life but seeing no other way to make out a fortune . . . I buckled myself to the profession.”

Smith felt something of a personal connection to the war in the Netherlands, for Lord Willoughby—the man his father had charged him to “honoure and love”—had won renown there. Eleven years before John joined the fighting, Willoughby had led 250 cavalry and 300 foot soldiers against a force of 3,000 Spaniards under the Duke of Parma. Willoughby won a famous victory and a knighthood. He would become celebrated in a song chanted by generations of English schoolchildren, and perhaps even by young John Smith himself:

The fifteenth day of July,
 With glistering spear and shield,
 A famous fight in Flanders
 Was foughten in the field.
 The most courageous officers
 Were English captains three.
 But the bravest man in battle
 Was the Brave Lord Willoughby.

By the time Smith arrived in the Netherlands, Lord Willoughby had departed; the queen had rewarded him by making him governor of Berwick-on-Tweed, a military post on the Scottish border. However, Smith received an assignment that indicated that Willoughby not only knew the young man, but trusted him. Willoughby’s elder son, Robert Bertie, was now stationed in the city of Orleans, and Smith brought Robert’s younger brother, Peregrine, from Lincolnshire to join him.

Robert Bertie, though two years younger than Smith, had already—at the tender age of fourteen!—earned a knighthood for his valor in the capture of the Spanish city of Cadiz by English forces. Smith might well have reflected that the son of a nobleman had greater opportunities for advancement than the son of a yeoman, who was destined to be a foot soldier and not an officer. Thus, when an opportunity for advancement presented itself, Smith seized it. Possibly through the Bertie family’s influence, he

received a letter of introduction to powerful figures at the court of King James VI of Scotland (who would in a few years become Elizabeth's successor and reign in England as James I). Smith sailed for Scotland, but his boat was wrecked off the English coast. Fortunately, he was saved from drowning, and recuperated for some time on the island of Lindisfarne. Finally reaching Scotland, he found to his disappointment that he had "neither money, nor meanes to make him a Courtier." No doubt he realized that he didn't have the temperament for it either—a wise decision, for the court of King James was, even more than Elizabeth's, a hot-bed of intrigue and conspiracy where flattery and backbiting were necessary skills.

Around 1600 John Smith, now twenty, returned home to Willoughby-by-Alford, somewhat deflated and disillusioned by his experiences abroad. Still, he found himself a kind of local hero, in demand at the local alehouse to tell the stories of his adventures for the enjoyment of his friends, farmboys like himself but who had never ventured more than a few miles from home.

The notoriety quickly wore thin. As Smith wrote, "within a short time being glutted with too much company, wherein he took small delight, he retired himself into a little woodie pasture, a good way from any town. Here by a faire brooke he built a Pavilion of boughes, where only in his cloaths he lay." Smith had withdrawn from the world to meditate, study, and—now that he knew the world better than before—decide what his place in it would be. He had already turned down a chance for a higher education, for a merchant's career, or even his father's occupation as a yeoman farmer. He had failed to win a name for himself in battle or to enter the ranks of royal courtiers. Only here, in his retreat near Willoughby, had he found sufficient respect to acquire a local boy, who served as his "page," bringing him food and running errands.

Smith tells us the names of only two of the books he read during his solitary sojourn: "Marcus Aurelius" and Machiavelli's *The Art of War*. These titles are misleading. The work known today as *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, believed to have been written by the Roman emperor of that name, was not translated

into English until 1634. It is highly likely that the book Smith read was a work titled *The Diall of Princes*. (“Diall” here refers to a compass, meaning roughly “directions for.”) It was written by a Spanish courtier and priest named Don Anthony de Guevara and passed off by him as a translation of Marcus Aurelius’s meditations. After the Guevara work was published in Spain in 1529, it won immense popularity and was translated into many languages. Two English translations were extant at the time Smith sought to refocus his life.

The Diall is largely composed of advice given by an older man to a younger one on how to live a noble life, which would certainly appeal to Smith, who was looking for a mentor. Guevara viewed women with a jaundiced eye, and this too may have had a lasting effect on the impressionable English youth. The following passage is typical of the work’s antifeminist spirit:

“Always from my youth I had a good mind, and yet, for all that, I have been overthrown with vices. Oh, how many times in my youth I knew women, I accompanied with women, I talked with women, and believed women, the which in the end have deceived me, misused me and defamed me. At the last I withdrew myself and forsook them, but I do confess that if reason kept me from their houses ten days, sensuality kept me with them ten weeks. . . . The frail flesh is somewhat to blame, but much more is the foolish and light woman in fault. For if men were certain that women were chaste . . . they would not dispose their hearts, their bodies, nor . . . consume their time to follow them, lose their goods to serve them. . . . For the hungry worms gnaw in the grave only the frail and slimy flesh of the dead: but you women destroy the goods, honour, and life of the living.” There is more—much more—in this vein in *The Diall of Princes*, and it may have reinforced Smith’s misogynistic feelings.

The other book Smith recalled reading, Machiavelli’s *The Art of War*, contained material that Smith found useful in advancing his career. For the translator of the then current English edition, Peter Whitehorne, had appended another treatise to Machiavelli’s work, one that gave detailed instructions on how to make “Saltpeter, Gunpowder, and divers formes of fireworkes or wilde fire.” Smith made good use of this information later in life.

One book Smith could *not* have read at that time—because it was not published until 1605 and not in English until 1612—nevertheless comes to mind when one reads his account of his activities during his self-imposed isolation: “his exercise a good horse, with his lance and Ring; his food was thought to be more of venison than any thing else; what he wanted his man brought him. The countrey [people] wondering at such an Hermite.” Inevitably this suggests Miguel de Cervantes’s fictional hero, Don Quixote, whose devotion to the ideals of chivalry found its outlet in madness.

In England as well as Spain, though the age of chivalry was drawing to a close—if indeed it was not dead already—young men like Smith were still fascinated by it. Many popular books celebrated the deeds of knights-errant, and some were in fact imports from Spain and Portugal, such as the *Amadis of Gaul* and the *Palmerin* romances, the same books that Cervantes was satirizing in his famous epic. An autobiography by an English merchant’s son, written in the seventeenth century, describes their effect:

“All the time I had from School . . . I spent in reading these Books; so that I being wholly affected to them, and reading how that *Amadis* and other Knights not knowing their Parents, did in time prove to be Sons of Kings and great Personages; I had such a fond and idle Opinion, that I might in time prove to be some great Person.”

In these works of fiction, a knight could gain renown and glory by acts of valor, particularly in battle. Smith had not as yet achieved such feats, even though from boyhood he had before him the real-life exploits of men such as Drake, Hawkins, and, closest to him, “the brave Lord Willoughby.” Imagine, then, the effect on him when a visitor of royal blood arrived one day at his hermitage. This was Theodore Paleologue, a man who claimed collateral descent from Constantine XI, the last man to occupy the throne of the Byzantine Empire, who had died defending his realm against the infidel Turks in 1453. Paleologue, a refugee from his homeland, was now riding master to the Earl of Lincoln. He had been sent by Smith’s “friends”—no doubt Lord Willoughby or his sons—because they thought Smith needed to be jolted out of his daydreams.

Paleologue took Smith to Tattersall, the Earl of Lincoln's estate, where he gave him riding lessons and talked—telling him better stories, perhaps, than the ones Smith had been reading, and igniting the spirit of the Crusaders within his breast. Smith was to display unusual skill as a horseman; this was the place where he learned it, practicing long hours under the tutelage of Paleologue. At last Smith had a teacher he had to respect and obey. Besides horsemanship, Paleologue gave him a cause to fight for, telling him of the titanic struggle between Christianity and Islam. The Ottoman Turks, who had made Constantinople their capital and renamed it Istanbul, had been defeated on the seas by a confederation of European powers at Lepanto in 1571. Despite this loss, the Turks still controlled many formerly Christian lands in eastern Europe and the Balkans. Rudolf II, the Holy Roman Emperor, was now trying to regain these territories, putting together a coalition of forces that would serve as a counterweight to Turkish power.

Smith tells us that he had disliked fighting in France and the Netherlands because it was a war in which Christians were slaughtering one another. But the Turks—Muslim infidels—were enemies he could oppose without qualm, and before long he was off to Europe, with little more than a vague idea of how to join the battle.