

THE FROZEN PIRATE.

BY W. CLARK RUSSELL. CHAPTER XV. THE PIRATE'S STORY.

I saw how it was—he supposed me deluged, a mortifying construction to place upon the language of a man who had restored him to life; yet a few moments reflection taught me to see the reasonableness of it, for unless he thought me crazy he must conclude I spoke the truth, and it was inconceivable that he should believe that he had lain in a frozen condition for eight-and-forty years.

I know not how it was, but I felt no joy in this man's company. For some companion, for some one to speak with, I had yearned again and again with heart-breaking passion; and now a living man sat before me, yet I was sensible of no gladness.

I have no doubt the disorder my mind was in helped to persuade him that I had not the full possession of my senses. He ran his eye over my figure and then round the cook-room, and said, "I am impatient to learn your story, sir."

"Why, sir," said I, "my story is summed up in what I have already told you. But that he might not be at a loss—for to be sure he had only very newly collected his intellects—I related my adventures at large. He drew nearer to the furnace while I talked, bringing his covering of clothes along with him, and held out his great hands to toast at the fire, all the time observing me with scarce a wink of the eye.

He poked up one foot after the other, counting his toes, fearing some had come away with his stockings, and then said, "Well, and how long should I have slept had you not come! Another week! By St. Paul, I might have died. Have you my stockings, sir?"

I gave them to him, and he pulled them over his legs and then drew on his boots and stood up, and the coats and wraps tumbling off him as he rose. "I can stand," says he. "That is good."

"Patience, my friend, patience!" he muttered as if to himself. "I must lie a little longer, and with that he knelt and then lay along the mattress. He breathed heavily and pointed to the pannikin. I asked him whether he would have wine or brandy; he answered, "Wine," so I melted a draught, and which dose, I thought, on top of what he had already taken, would send him to sleep; but instead it quickened his spirits, and with no lack of life in his voice he said, "What is the condition of the vessel?"

"The vessel is in a condition of ruin, and I am not sure that it is worth saving," I answered. "Yes, but not yet; that is, if the ice in breaking doesn't destroy her. The summer season has yet to come, and we are progressing north; but now that you are with me it will be a question for us to settle, whether we are to wait for the ice to release the schooner or endeavour to effect our escape by other means."

A curious gleam of cunning satisfaction shone in his eyes as he looked at me; he then kept silence for some moments, lost in thought. "Pray," said I, breaking in upon him, "what ship is this?"

He started, deliberated an instant, and answered, "The *Boca del Dragon*." "A Spaniard?" he nodded. "She was a pirate?" said I.

Let me feel my strength improving; we shall then find means of throwing a light upon these black prospects of yours." He smiled, or rather grinned, his fangs making the latter term fit for the mirthless grimace he made. "My I ask your name?" said I. "Julius Tassard, at your service," said he, "in command of the *Boca del Dragon*, but good as Mate Trentanove, and good as Captain Mendoza, and good as the cabin boy Fernando Prado; for we pirates are republicans, sir, we know no social distinctions save those we order for the convenience of working-ship. Now let me tell you the story of our disaster. We had come out of the Spanish Main into the South Sea, partly to escape some British and French cruisers which were after us and others of our kind, and partly because ill-luck was against us, and we could not find our account in those waters. We sailed in December two years ago—"

"Making the year—?" I interrupted. He started, and then grinned again. "Ah, to be sure!" cried he, "this is eighteen hundred and one; but to keep my tale in countenance, he went on in a satirical apologetic way, "let me call the year in which we sailed for the South Sea seventeen hundred and fifty-one. What matters forty or fifty years to the ship-wrecked? Is not one day in an open boat, with no society but the devils of memory and no hope but the silence at the bottom of the sea, an eternity? Fill me that pannikin, my friend. I thank you. To proceed; we cruised some months in the South Sea and took a number of ships. One was a privateer that had plundered a British Indian in the Southern Ocean, and had entered the South Sea by New Holland. This fellow was full of fine clothes and had some silver in his pocket. We took what we wanted, and let her go with her people under hatches, her yards square, her helm amidships, and her cabin on fire. Our oxmaxin is, 'No witness!' That is the pirate's philosophy. Who gives us quarter unless it be to hang us! But to continue; we did handsomely, but were a long time about it, and after careening and filling up with water 'twixt San Carlos and Chiloe we set sail for the Antilles. Like your brig, we were blown south. The weather was ferocious. Gale after gale thundered down upon us, forcing us to fly before it. We lost all reckoning of our position; for days, for weeks, sea and sky were enveloped in clouds of snow, in the heart of which drove our frozen schooner. We were none of us of a nationality fit to encounter these regions. We swept past many vast icebergs, which would leap on a sudden out of the white whirl of thickness, often so close aboard that the recoil of the surge striking against the mass would flood our decks. At all moments of the day and night we were prepared to feel the shock of the vessel crushing her bows against one of these stupendous hills. The cabin resounded with salves and Aves, with invocations to the saints, promises, curses, and litanies. The cold does not make men of the Spaniards, who are but indifferent seamen in temperate climes, and we were chiefly Spanish with consciences as red as your English flag."

He grinned, emptied the pannikin, and stretched his hands to the fire to warm them. "One morning, the weather having cleared somewhat, we found ourselves surrounded by ice. A great chain floated ahead of us, extending far into the south. The gale blew dead on to this coast; we durst not haul the schooner to the wind, and our only chance lay in discovering some bay where we might find shelter. Such a bay it was my good luck to spy, lying directly in a line with the ship's head. I seized the helm, and shouted to the men to hoist the head, of the mainsail that she might round to when I put the helm down. But the fellows were in a panic terror and stood gaping at what they regarded as their doom, calling upon the Virgin and all the saints for help and mercy. Into this bay did we rush on top of a huge sea, Trentanove and the captain and I swinging with set teeth at the tiller, that was hard a-lee, she came round, but with such way upon her that she took a long shoving beach of ice and ran up it to the distance of half her own length, and there she lay, with her rudder within touch of the wash of the water. The men, regarding the schooner as lost, and concluding that if she went to pieces her boats would be destroyed, and with their only chance to escape from the ice, fell frantic and lost their wits altogether. They roared, 'To the boats! to the boats!' The captain endeavored to bring them to their senses; he and I and the mate, and Joan Barros, the boatswain—a Portuguese—went among them pistols in hand, entreating, cursing, threatening. "Think of the plunder in this hold! Will you abandon it without an effort to save it? What think you are your chances for life in open boats in this sea? But reason as we would the cowardly dogs refused to listen. They had broached a spirit-cask aft, and passed the liquor along the decks whilst they hoisted the pinnace out of the hold and got the other boats over. The drink maddened, yet left them wild with fear. They would not wait to come at the treasure in the run—the fools believed the ship would tumble to pieces as she stood—but entered the forecabin and the officers' cabins, and routed about for whatever money and trinkets they might stuff into their pockets without loss of time; and then provisioning the boats, they called to us to join them, but we said, 'No, on which they ran the boats down to the water, tumbled into them, and pulled away round the point of ice. We lost sight of them then, and I have little doubt that they all perished shortly afterwards."

"And this," said I, "was in seventeen hundred and fifty three?" "Yes," he answered; "and this is eighteen hundred and one—eight-and-forty years afterwards, 'he' and he laughed out again. "I've talked so much," said he, "that I don't know, I think another nap will do me good. What coils have you found in the ship?" I told him. "Good," he cried; "we can keep ourselves warm for some time to come, anyhow."

And so saying, he pulled a rug up to his nose and shut his eyes. (To be continued.)

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Children Cry for Pitcher's Castoria.

a treasure on board which we risked our necks to get, and we were prepared to go on impelling our lives to save it. But the cold was frightful; it was not in flesh and blood to stand it. One day—we had been locked up about five months—Mendoza said he would get upon the rocks and take a view of the sea. He did not return. The others were too weak to seek him, and they were half blind besides; I went, but the ice was full of caves and hollows, and the like, and I could not find him, nor could I look for him long, the cold being the hand of death itself up there. The time went by; Trentanove went stone-blind, and I had to put food and drink into his hands that he might live. A week before the stupor came upon me I went on deck and saw Joan Barros leaning at the rail. I called to him, but he made no reply. I approached and looked at him, and found him frozen. Then happened what I have told you. We were in the cabin, the mate seated at the table waiting for me to lead and support him to the cook-room, for he was so weak he could scarce carry his weight. A sudden faintness seized me, and I sank down upon the bench opposite him, letting my head fall upon my arms. His cry startled me—I looked up—saw him as I have said; and the cabin then turned black, my head sank again, and I remember no more."

"That is all! They are dead—Julius Tassard lives! The devil is loyal to his own!" and with that he lay back and burst into laughter.

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