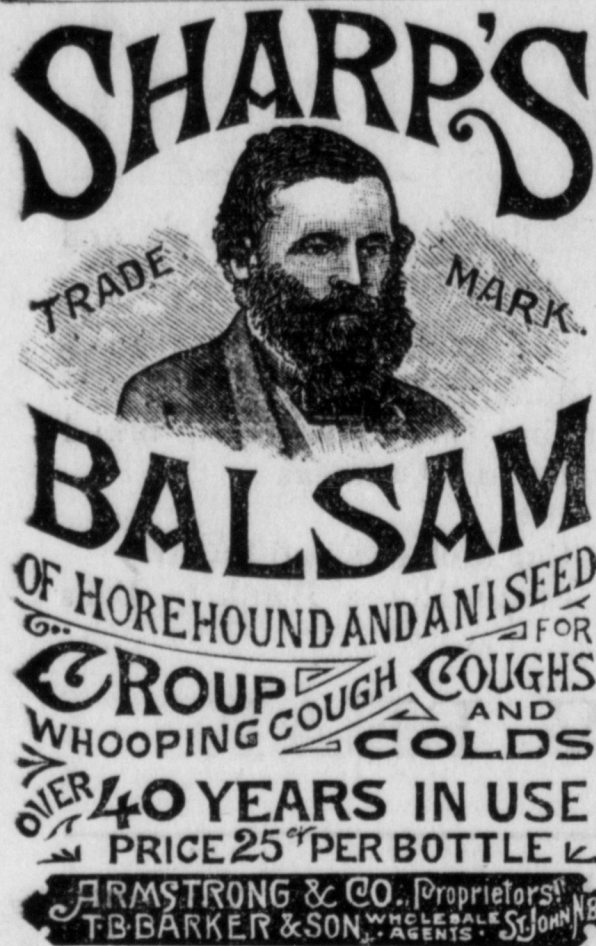


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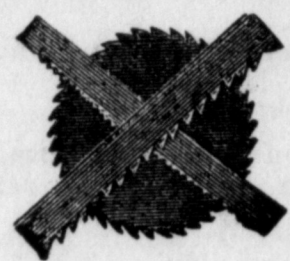
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CHAPTER XXIX.—Continued.

The dew started from my brows and my hands turned as wet as though I had lifted them dripping from a basin of oil. Had I endeavored to run away, my legs would have failed me. I felt Miss Grant trembling from head to toe, in the vibratory, nervous grasp she had of my arm. Why, here was a man who had at least twelve hours before fallen dead in our presence, and whom I had soon afterward buried in the sea, securing him against the possibility of rising by a sinker weighing enough to keep two such fellows down; here was the same man, I say, now standing before me, stalking out of the forest, it would seem, instead of out of the ocean, dressed as I had buried him—a dusky outline with a black face combining with the gloom, and his eyes touched with the faint sparkles of the moonlight that he confronted.

"Oh, speak to him! What is it?" exclaimed Miss Grant.

Thrice I endeavored to articulate, but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth dry and parched as the sands upon which we stood; but at the fourth effort I managed to find my voice, and nothing huskier ever rattled in human throat.

"In God's name," I said, "who are you?"

He answered, but in a language I did not know.

"It is Spanish," whispered Miss Grant, "negro Spanish. He is not a ghost, then; but, oh, what can he be? He was dead, Mr. Musgrave, when you buried him."

"Do you speak Spanish, Miss Grant?" said I.

She answered yes.

"For Heaven's sake, then, address him and solve this horrible mystery!" I cried.

She was too terrified to speak to him yet. She continued to cling to me with shivers chasing her. Why, the heart of a Boadicea might have swooned at such an apparition. And the time of its coming, too!—this dimly tintured gloom—the streak of westerling moon—the dark sea floating out into the distant silence, with our supreme conviction that the corpse of the black object we were looking at lay with a stone attached to it fathoms beneath the surface.

He addressed us again in the same tongue, in the thick, throaty guttural of the African, this time delivering a pretty long sentence, while he stood before us with his arms hanging up and down, with a supplicatory inclination of his head toward us, and an occasional totter of his black shanks.

"What does he say?" I cried.

"It is hard to catch his meaning," she said; "he speaks a very strange kind of Spanish. I think that what he wants to say is that he is alone and ill, and asks us not to hurt him."

"This is no ghost, Miss Grant," said I; "the poor devil has in some astonishing fashion come off with his life, and we must learn how. There's a sup of spirits below; a dram along with something to eat will help his tongue."

I stepped up to him, Miss Grant meanwhile keeping a tight hold of my arm, and with a motion of my hand invited him to accompany us. He at once complied, and the three of us walked to our underground chambers. We had made a very thrifty use of our candles, and had still a few wax ends left. I asked Miss Grant to request him to remain outside till I called him. She did so, and then said: "Do you mean to ask him to come down here?"

"He won't hurt us," said I; "he is no ghost. Kindness will make him grateful."

"But suppose he believes you meant to drown him?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, we'll clear his mind of that notion," said I, for I was now rallying fast, with a hope rising in me that something helpful to ourselves might come out of this business, and consumedly curious besides, as you may suppose, to learn how the fellow had come to life again.

"I will go first," exclaimed Miss Grant. We had still a drop of the ship's rum left; I mixed a dram for him in a soup and bouilli-tin, noticing that he threw the remains of a plantain he had been eating into the furnace to receive the draught.

Indeed, as he afterwards told us, he had found a tolerable meal among the fruit past the forest, and he was eating plantains when he first hove in sight, as I had gathered from the motion of his arm. However, he could find a corner for a large piece of turtle which I handed to him, devouring it with great relish and avidity.

"Let us get his story, Miss Grant," said I.

She addressed him nervously; he stood up on being spoken too, but sat again on my motioning him to resume his chair. Nervous and agitated as she was, the rich syllables of the noble tongue rolled in honey from her lips, and as was her face by the negro's so was the melody of her Castilian utterance inexpressibly sweetened and brightened by the hoarse, thick speech of the red-coated fiend. It was like the warbling of a flute alternating with the gong-like roll of a tom-tom.

"What does he say?" said I, after he

had been spinning a twister lasting over five minutes.

"Why," she answered, "that he awoke as if from a long sleep this evening some time after midnight, and found himself lying on the beach on his back, on the west side of the island, as I suppose, from his speaking of the situation of the hummock. He does not know how he came there. He recollected arriving here this morning in a boat, and fainting away after drinking the water you gave him. He says after lying a little he rose and walked toward some trees, where he presently heard a sound of running waters. He drank, and then sought for fruit, but appears to have lost himself in the forest; though a little before he made his appearance he came across the plantains. That is his story."

"Then," said I, looking at him, "it is no great mystery after all, though a mighty wonder all the same. He was not dead of course, when he dropped after the drink. Well, now, the big stone that I jammed into his waist-cloth must have rolled out of it when I hove him over the side. It was a sickening business, and the instant I had cleared the boat I sculled up the creek without looking astern. Then what could have followed? The poor fellow floated up on his back, for he must have drowned with his face down, and was carried by the tide to that part of the island where he stranded. Had we looked we might have seen him floating, but we were too busy with the boat; and when he had weathered the spit of sand he would be out of sight of us at the head of the creek. Ask him if he knows what this island is?"

She addressed him again, speaking now with growing confidence, though her first superstitious fears hung a little lightly upon her. He shook his head while he answered. She spoke to him afresh and then told me that he was not only ignorant of the name of the island, but had not the least idea of the situation of others in these seas; so there was an end of my expectation of him as a pilot. She questioned him further, and his story was to this effect: First of all, he and his companion had been runaway slaves. They stole a boat and blew out to sea from somewhere near Point Maysi, thinking to land at Tortuga, but were sighted and picked up by an English craft and entered as seamen aboard her; but the usage they met with was so barbarous, mainly owing to their inability to understand the orders addressed to them, that they resolved to run from the ship at the first opportunity that offered. A chance was provided by the master of the vessel bringing up under the lee of an island, probably not very remote from our own, to seek shelter, as was to be supposed from the storm that swept these waters the other night. There was a boat riding astern to a long line, and when the night came down dark, and the hands were below saving the anchor watch lookout, the blacks dropped over the side, their dusky skins making their movements very secret in the gloom, and swam stealthily to the boat. But it was already blowing with a bit of popple on in the bay where the ship rode, with the flight of the wind scurrying down the mountain side, and they had scarce rolled inboard over the gunwale when the line parted and they were blown out to sea. So this was the fellow's story a bit of which I had anticipated hours before at the sight of the shredded strands of rope. Trusting he might have a few words of English sufficient to understand my questions, so as to save Miss Grant the trouble of inquiring and then interpreting I sung out to him:

"You speakee English?"

"No, no; no speakee," he cried, shaking his head vehemently.

"You no sabbee now to pilot boat," I roared.

"No, speakee, no speakee," he bawled, wringing his hands; and then looking at Miss Grant with eyes full of piteous entreaty, oddly accentuated by a broad supplicatory grin that bared his great ivory teeth to the junction of his jaws almost, he poured out a whole torrent of words in Spanish to her, clasping his hands while he rattled on, and then dropped plump on both knees before us when he had finished.

"What is it all about?" said I.

"He swears by the Holy Virgin and all the saints that he does not speak English," said Miss Grant, "and implores you to believe him. The poor fellow has been terribly cowed by ill-treatment. He thinks because you are English you will punish him for not being able to speak our language."

I motioned him to rise, and to top the encouragement of my face I mixed him another dram, which he drank on his knees making some mysterious motion of amity, or perhaps affection, by holding one arm stiff upright after the manner of certain South African tribes, then rose and seated himself.

"It is getting very late," said I, looking at my watch; "there will be a long day before us in that open boat to-morrow, though pray Heaven it may not be longer than a day. I would urge you to take some rest."

"I am not at all sleepy," she replied. "I am too excited to lie down; what with this apparition and the prospect of our sailing to-morrow, I shall not be able to sleep indeed."

"The poor fellow will want to turn in," said I. "Rolled up in a rug, he'll lie snug enough near the furnace. You will not object to his occupying this room?"

She looked askant at him, and said a

I took a rug and handed it to the black motioning him to make a bed of it against the furnace, to which I pointed. He understood me promptly, grinning gratefully little doubtfully: "No, I should have no fear of him at all but for the really terrifying wonder of his restoration to life."

Here the negro yawned prodigiously, uttering a bawling sound as he yawned.

and wrapped the rug around him as he stood, with a proud glance at the embellishment, he lay down with the docility of a trained dog, using his arm for a pillow, and in a few minutes was snoring like thunder, sound asleep. He lay upon his back with his mouth wide open, and I can only compare the sound he produced to the noise made by the keel of a boat dragging over shingle.

Presently Miss Grant called softly to know if I were awake.

"Very much awake, indeed," said I.

"All is well while he snores like that," she exclaimed.

"Yes," I answered. "It is happy for us that he should be our guest for one night only. Imagine three weeks of this!"

CHAPTER XXX.

WE LEAVE THE ISLAND.

"Is that you moving, Mr. Musgrave?" exclaimed Miss Grant, from behind her curtain.

"Yes," said I; "the dawn has broken. You have not slept, I fear?"

"No," she answered, "I have not closed my eyes."

"Pray, endeavor to get a little sleep," I exclaimed. "Mumbo-Jumbo here can help me in the few preparation that remain, and I don't doubt of making myself understood. Even an hour's sleep will be helpful. Don't doubt that I shall call you when we are ready to get under way," I added, laughing.

She answered me by whipping back the shawl along the rod and stepping forth. "How can you talk of sleeping now?" she exclaimed; "the instant you are ready Mr. Musgrave, let us start."

I was glad to hear her say this.

The negro was snoring as briskly as ever. I stirred him with my foot, but I probed him in this way for some time before he opened his eyes. He rose slowly onto his cucumber shanks, scratching his head with a dull stare of mystification, as I thought, in his dusky eyes as he rolled them from me my to companion, and then addressed her. She answered; he spoke again with growing energy; she nodded, on which, to my astonishment, he clasped his hands and dropped upon his knees, and fell to pouring out a whole jumble of words, the imploring character of which was gatherable from the tone of his voice.

"What is the matter with the poor wretch?" said I, "have his wits left him during the night?"

"He is entreating me to beg you not to take him away from the island," said Miss Grant, veiling him with surprise and pity.

"But does he know," I cried, "that if we leave him here he will be all alone; not another black even to keep him company?"

She spoke to him again, motioning him at the same time to rise from his knees. Her question produced a very long answer. His looks and inflections of speech pronounced him desperately in earnest. I could not follow a syllable; time was pressing, moreover, for I desired, when afloat, all the daylight I could get, and I was growing a little impatient when Miss Grant, turning to me, said: "He desires to stop here. Indeed, I believe, could you even carry him to the boat by main force, he would jump overboard and swim back to the island on your letting go of him. He says it would be like being a king in his own country to live in these fine rooms and have the island all to himself."

"Humanity forbids it!" said I, amazed. "But what is to be done?" she exclaimed.

"If he won't come, why, then, of course he must stop."

"He will not come," she exclaimed; "he is a runaway slave, remember, fresh, too, from being cruelly treated, even when dealt with as a freeman. He means to stop here, indeed."

"Then please tell him, Miss Grant, that he may do as he pleases; but I should have been glad to have the use of those brawny arms. He can't starve, and may be when he wishes to leave he'll know how to go to work. We have no powder, but he is welcome to those muskets yonder," nodding toward them.

On this being interpreted to the poor fellow, he burst into a hundred passionate explanations of joy, was so convulsed with delight, indeed, that I expected to see him plump down upon his nose and roll upon the floor in his ecstasy. He clasped his hands, made as if to embrace me, recoiled a step with a frantic skip, leaped with such agility that his head struck the ceiling with force enough to have struck him motionless had his cranium been a white man's.

I had nearly completed all necessary arrangements on the preceding day. The halyards, formed of a length of coir rope, the strands unalaid, halved and laid up again into a smaller line, were rove; the sail of colored shawls was bent to the yard. There remained but little more than to fill a few outstanding bottles with water, stow away the crawfish and the like.

All being ready we slowly left the underground rooms which had sheltered us

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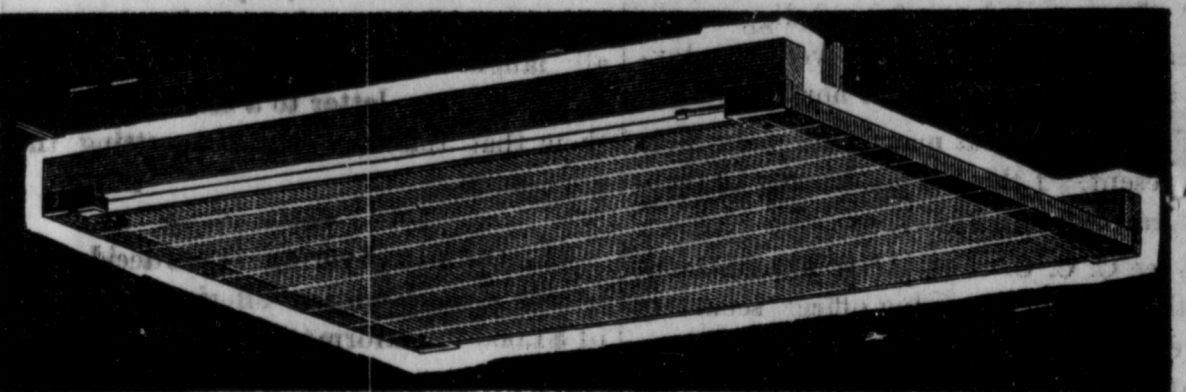
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