

John Topp, Pirate.

By Weatherby Chesney
and Alick Munro.

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(Continued.)

"No fault o' the captain's," put in Willie Trehalton, "for I watched him. No fault o' them Spanish devils neither. He was ever where the blows was the thickest, an they rained them on him like autumn leaves in a hurricane."

"Good luck armored me," said Alec. "Come, lads, out oars again and give me one. Willie, can you manage to sit up on the stern thwart and steer? I've shipped the rudder."

"Aye, aye, captain! Or row, either, at a pinch. I'm nigh all right again now, though but for Master Topp I should 'a' had to stop beside the post. They lashings had shrunk so w' the water that my feet was like a dead man's. Where shall I make for, captain?"

"You know the island that shields the harbor mouth?"

"Yes, captain. Shelter island we called it."

"It's steep, too, on this side, but there should be a sloping beach to norward. Make round for there and see if you can't put us ashore. Now, lads, give way with a will."

The night was pitchy dark, but the boatswain's solitary eye pierced the blackness and steered us on an arrow's course till he made the Carrack rock. Then, bearing away a point to the westward, he guided us by the direction of the ocean swell and by the fanning of a light westerly breeze which had again sprung up toward what he judged would be the tail of the island. We heard surf pounding upon it before we saw a rock, and drawing on cautiously inshore, coasted along in search of a landing place. The tide was just upon the top of its flood, and not an inch of foreshore could we discover till we reached the north end of the island, for up to that point the coast was bound by black, rugged rocks that shot down sheer into the water. But here we came upon a sloping beach and ran the boat up on it, getting her three parts filled in the heavy surf, for the ground swell was running straight in. However, as the boat did not get staved and as the wetting was rather refreshing than otherwise, we thought ourselves very lucky in our fortune. At any rate we were free.

"Now," said Alec after wounds had been dressed as well as circumstances would permit and we had thrown our weary bodies to rest on a bed of short, dry moss, "who can make a tracing on the chart of the future?"

"I should like another cut at the dons, captain, an with a better weapon in my hand than a charred wood billet," said one of the men promptly, and a deep voiced assent hummed round the assembly.

"They bain't got much worth taking in that cave o' theirs," said Willie Trehalton, "but there should be tidy pickings on the old carrack. There were a gould crucifixion in the after cabin, an a tale was going about that Don Miguel always carried his private hoard in the locker under his berth."

"What say you, Jack?" said Alec to me in a whisper.

"Have at 'em whenever we get a chance," I replied briskly.

"Nosing the plunder, eh, old sea

thief?" he said, with a laugh, and then in louder tones for all to hear: "I'm with you, one and all, in not letting the dons rest in peace. What's your plan, Willie?"

"Stay here an recruit till we are sound," replied the boatswain, "an then catch them napping some night in their cave an smoke them like badgers."

"I fear," said Alec, "they will keep too good a watch to be trapped like that. But with our other lads"—

"What other lads, captain?" asked half a dozen voices eagerly.

"Has no one told how we rose on the Spaniards in the galley and after taking her by storm were wrecked among the breakers?"

"No, captain, but it's brave news. How many o' you are there?"

Alec gave them an account of all that had befallen us and told them the names of the lads who were saved. "And now," he said when he had finished, "launch me the boat, and I'll take this fair wind across to Galley Island and bring them back with me."

"Best take a second hand, captain."

"No; he would only be another to bring back, and the load will be heavy enough anyway. The boat has her mast and sail stowed along the thwarts, and this breeze will hold long enough to carry me over."

So we ran the boat down, waded out and helped her through the breakers and then returned to our moss beds, where, in spite of our wounds, we slept sounder and more comfortably than we had yet done since first we fell into the hands of the Spaniards, many months ago, at the fight by the mountain torrent. Ah, me! Many a brave lad that was full of life and hope on that day was now asleep beneath the waves. Our search for El Dorado had not brought us much luck as yet, but we still hoped. And when men have hope, who shall say that any quest is vain?

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CHAPTER XVII.

Waking when the morning sun was high in the heavens, we found him they called the cordwainer lying stark and stiff. Poor lad, he had better stuck to his cobbling bench and left adventuring in the western seas to tougher bodies and more contented minds! For in life he was ever grumbling and complaining, as is often the case with those of his craft, and in death he made but a thin and weakly corpse. We gave him the best burial we could, digging the grave with sword blades and piling it high with sea worn bowlders, and then set ourselves, those of us who could walk, to hunting for breakfast.

The search was not marked by any overpowering success. Our island was sparsely wooded with low scrub, but its parched surface bore no fruit trees. Birds there were in plenty, but we could not catch them. And so we had to be contented with a meal of shell-fish, of which fortunately the rocks yielded an inexhaustible store. At first we hoped to have been able to cook these, for many of us had seen the Indians light a fire by sharply rubbing a small pencil of wood along a larger block, and we knew that Willie Trehalton, though he never acquired the true heathen dexterity, had often succeeded in imitating them. Now, however, we had not the proper sort of timber, and the various makeshifts we tried refused even to smolder. So, as one of the Cornishmen said, "We had 'een to fancy ourselves haakey fish an swallow the baits raw."

The chief thing, however, which made it imperative that our stay on the island should be brief was the complete lack of fresh water. Search high, search low, we could find neither stream nor spring, and had it not been that there were a few rain filled pools lying here and there among the rocks we should hardly under such a sun as now beat down upon us have lived out the day, for from sea water no man, be he alchemist, be he wizard or be he honest mariner, has ever extracted a drinkable fluid, nor ever will, say I.

After breakfast Willie Trehalton and I had a talk.

"There's half a gale blowing from the eastward, Master Topp, an like to come on harder," said he. "An there's too heavy a sea running for a deep laden boat to cross without swamping,

let alone that if they tried to beach her she'd be knocked to noggin staves in less time than I'd take to down a mug o' ale. So we needn't expect Captain Ireland over today, nor yet for two more days mebbe."

"I'm afraid you're right," said I. "Well, we can only wait."

(To be continued.)

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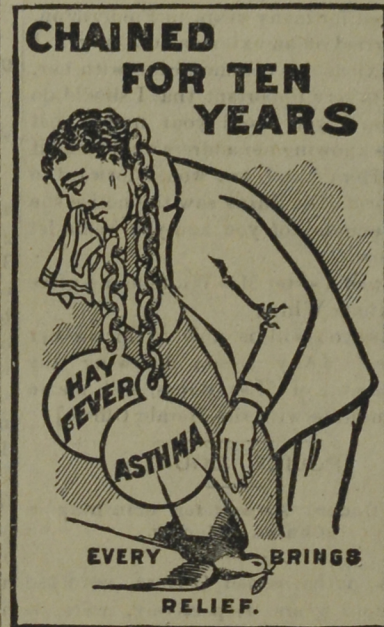
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