

JOHN TOPP, PIRATE.

By WEATHERBY CHESNEY and ALICE MUNRO.

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[CONTINUED.]

"Captain Ireland, many a good ship's been cast away through her captain quarrelling with his officers. Master Topp, an officer who can't keep a civil tongue for his superiors oftentimes gets hanged. Job, you graceless loon, what cause to come grinning down here for?"

"Glass run out, uncle. My watch over."

"Captain Ireland, then it's your next watch, an I hope you'll pardon an old mariner for plain speaking when it was needed."

Without a word Alec left the cabin and went on deck.

Through the whole of that watch I lay in my bunk brooding, brooding, brooding. To quarrel with my sworn shipmate, and about such a trifle too! Fool that I was! That we had had a serious wrangle and one whose consequences might easily bode ill for the success of our venture there was no doubt, but on looking back on what had passed I was almost as much fogged as Willie Trehallion to know what the cause of it all was. Fool, I called myself, and, again, fool!

Nep came to me and shoved his cold nose against my cheek, and I rubbed his coarse, scrubby coat and coaxed him to lie down. I was grateful to him, for I felt less wretched with a companion, though he were nothing but a cat. But then Nep was not as other cats.

After his watch was out Alec came below, and by the dim light of the horn lantern which hung to the beams I could see him pacing the other side of the cabin thwart ships. He could not see me, and I gave no sign of being awake. Presently he began to smile to himself, and then, turning his gait, made straight for my bunk.

"Jack, old boy, I was the bigger fool of the two."

"No, Alec; I was by far."

"No, I. It was my throwing the dice box through the port that started it."

"I proposed the dice."

"Come, come; we won't dispute again. I'll test you with jacks of ale."

We tied; I won, and from that moment the quarrel was never mentioned.

Next morning nine men were down with fevers, several others were undoubtedly sickening for them, and the rest were so scared that they were pretty sure to catch the ill on the first opportunity.

There was no wind to drive the fetid mists away, and so we had to get a boat and tow the Bristol Merchant up stream by our own exertions. Anything was better than letting the men stand trembling in idleness. But it was not till past midday that the stewing air was tempered with a breeze from the sea, which filled our sails and gave us headway against the sluggish current.

For five days did we tow, pole and sail through this awful canal. Nine men died. Almost all were sick, and but for the promise of the pagan and the dread of Alec's pistol in the magazine they would have turned the ship's beak to the sea again at any hazard.

On the afternoon of the sixth day

we opened out into a broad, clear flowing river, and before nightfall we were anchored in a snug little bay with a pile of bright colored fruits on deck, whose luscious freshness tempted the men to brave a sudden death from overeating.

None, however, was any the worse for this change of diet, though the surgeon shook his head and suggested a good bloodletting all around as a preventive of possible evils. The sick men, except one who was too far gone to recover, mended as though under a spell.

During our voyage up the mighty stream we were able to revel in fresh meat, too, for the forests abounded in game, and the Devon and Somerset men, who had poached scores of noble stags on brown, boggy Exmoor, sent their clothyard arrows and the cross-bow bolts into many a fine water buck as he came from the deep covers to gaze wonderingly with his great eyes on the strange craft that was furrowing the surface of his untilled river.

So fat venison stews smoked in the mess kids, and tough, brine fossilized beef became but a distant memory.

The navigation was easy, but slow. Alec was cautious about going too fast

for fear of picking up a shoal and getting tightly imbedded on it, so he kept the ship under easy canvas, very often brailing up our courses altogether, unless there seemed every prospect of a deep fairway.

Thirty-four days of this easy progress brought us to the great cataraet which barred our farther advance. The pagan had told us of it beforehand, and we heard the thunder of the waters a full day before we rose them. Anxious, however, to satisfy ourselves that the barrier really was impassable, we held on until the current grew too strong to force the ship against it under sail alone, and then we bore away into a vast lagoon on the northern bank, formed by the back swirl from the fall, and dropped our anchor in the midst of it.

CHAPTER X.

Next sunrise saw 50 of us ashore. We took nothing with us but our arms and accouterments, trusting to the wealth of the forest to provide us with all necessary provender by the way. Of the 101 men who had sailed out of Bristol river 24 had died, and the remaining 21, who were all weak from various ills, were left behind to guard the Bristol Merchant till our return.

"You will be quite safe," said Alec to them as they stood about the ship to watch our departure, "if you keep a bright lookout. There's small chance of men disturbing the Bristol Merchant in her present berth, and callers won't be so frequent as to be a nuisance. If you do have a visit from any one of the pagan tribes, try kindness first, and

if that fails, cannon. How long we may be gone I cannot say, but wait for us here three years at the least. You are in a land of plenty. The shores teem with duck and deer, the waters ripple with fish, the trees of the forest are bending with their load of fruit. Take, then, God's gifts that are offered, hold peace among yourselves, keep your culverins loaded, and no ill can befall you or your ship save old age and the ordinary maladies of life."

The men on the ship raised a cheer. We answered them from the shore. And so we parted.

There was no path through these virgin forests, for the wild beasts that held them never retirod their own footsteps, and man had not as yet penetrated their solitudes. To force a passage was a work of time and infinitely hard labor. It was hew and hack, hack and hew, wherever the big trees flourished, for the lianes which everywhere abounded had woven themselves into one solid mass of interlacing network. It was like breaking through a never ending wall of the strongest wickerwork, and I rather think that after the first 20 miles of this sort of tunneling many of our band of 50 envied the lazy lot of the 21 who were left behind to guard the Bristol Merchant.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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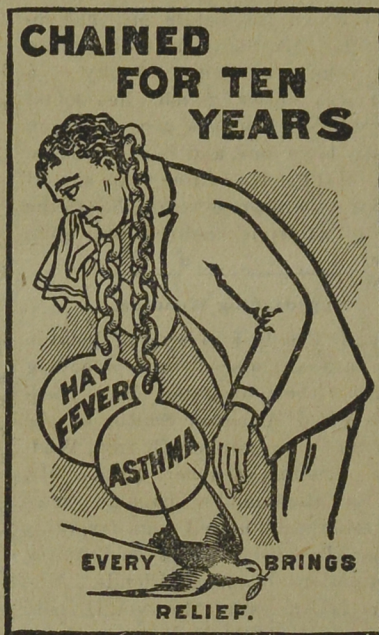
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