

JOHN TOPP, PIRATE.

By WEATHERBY CHESNEY and ALICK MUNRO.

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[CONTINUED.]

We went on deck at once and began to lower the boat. We were lying a good two miles farther out than the other ships, so we had a stiff pull before us.

Night was just beginning to fall, and there was some hope that the darkness might cover our movements and enable us to rescue Inez and then slip out of the harbor before the Spaniards had made up their minds to strike. It was a desperate chance, though.

The boat was already on the bulwarks when Alec shouted, "Hold on, all!"

"Too late," he said. "There's a fleet of boats putting out from the shore now, each one crammed full of soldiers. We must leave the other ships to shift for themselves, I'm afraid, and make a bid for our own freedom. That big fellow there, coming up before the wind, seems to have been told off to look after us."

We were well armed, of course, as the most peaceful ship has to be when there are so many sea thieves unharmed, and though the Spanish galleon was five times our size we would have thought nothing of tackling her, five Spaniards to one Englishman being by no means crushing odds, but there were three other ships outside of us evidently waiting to pick up stragglers, so we were to all appearances hopelessly shut in.

The men looked at one another in consternation.

Alec, however, had made his plan. "Put back the powder," he cried, "and buckle on your side arms. Not a shot must be fired, mind, or we shall have the whole nest of wasps buzzing round our ears. Every man of you take a pike or ax and hide under the bulwarks. We must make that fellow think he has caught us napping."

Our preparations were quickly and quietly made, and long before the big Spaniard was near enough to see what we were doing every man of us was under cover, and the decks looked quite deserted. But when he sheered alongside and hove his grapnels into our rigging Alec gave the word, and with a ringing cheer 50 lusty English lads rushed from their hiding places and were backing and prodding away among his crew before the unsuspecting Spaniard knew that anything had happened. They were taken completely by surprise, but after the first minute or so they recovered and fought like wildcats. They were about three to our one, so counting one Englishman to five of them the odds in our favor were overwhelming. The Spaniards fought desperately enough until about half of them had been killed, then the rest threw down their arms, called for "quarter" and scrambled down the ladders in utter rout. We clapped the hatches on them, and the big galleon of Spain was ours.

Leaving me with 20 men to take care of our prize (whose sails were all set), Alec tumbled back with the others to our own ship and set about making sail as quickly as he could.

"An ax here and cut the cable!" I heard him call. "No time to weigh!



"Put back the powder," he cried. "Not a shot must be fired."

Let go those spritsail brails! Lay out along the bolt spirit and cast the gaskets off! Flatten in the starboard sheet and cant her head round! Handsomely, now! Topsails next! Work with a will, lads! Time's precious!"

I lost the next words through the distance, and not wishing to slip too far ahead I bagged my mizzen, brailled my main course and so allowed Alec to creep up to me again.

He made sail with marvelous quickness and soon was within speaking distance.

"Are your guns all loaded, Jack?" "Aye, and double shot and the But stocks lighted and lying in the tubs beside them."

"Then make straight for that big chap on your larboard bow as if you meant to speak him. Fool him if you can. Say I'm your prize. If he suspects you, give him a broadside for his sharpness. Only keep the wind of him, and you can do what you like. I'll slip across his bow and pepper that side of him. And if that isn't enough do what your mother wit suggests, but mind it must be quickly done whatever it is or we'll have the other two beating up to help him."

Now, had I acted on my opinion I should have steered straight for the open sea, dead before the fair wind, in which case I should inevitably have aroused the suspicions of all three ships and so have allowed them to concentrate on our course and cut us off. Alec's plan was obviously the best, for when they saw I was steering plump for the southernmost one the others held quietly to their places in the mouth of the bay.

When I got within a cable's length, an officer hailed me. I waited as long as I dared and then answered, but apparently there was something wrong with my Spanish, for he replied angrily that I was drunk and an insolent scoundrel for daring so to address him. At this juncture one of my men, a soft hearted fellow, who knew enough of

the tongue to make out that the don was using very free language to me, let fly at him with his gun and sent a three ounce ball straight into his breastplate.

That effectively put an end to our diplomacy, so I gave the order to fire as each gun bore. I had warned the gunners to aim high, and at the third shot the Spaniard's maintopmast broke off short like a carrot. His mainyard, too, came down by the run, bringing the sail with it, but as he was still under command I put up past him, reloading the guns meanwhile and then hauling my wind once more gave him a second dose over either quarter.

Meanwhile Alec and his men had been working like furries and tossing their guns about like child's toys, raining such a shower of broken shot into his hull from their lesser elevation that his lower deck must have been almost untenable.

The Spaniard had been unprepared for our attack and took some time to beat his men to quarters, but they served their guns well and fast when they did get to them, and the shot soon came flying about our ears like hailstones. His running rigging, however, was pretty well cut to pieces, and as we had half a dozen good bowmen stationed ready who sent a clothyard shaft through the ribs of every man who set a foot on his ratlines he lay pretty helplessly head to wind, with his remaining sails in the most thorough confusion. Had we been able to play the game out at long bowls we could either have sunk him or reduced the number of his crew sufficiently to allow us to carry him by boarding, but the other two Spanish ships were beating up to us, and on her next tack the nearest would be within gunshot.

Alec therefore gave the word to run away west by south, before the wind, through the southern entrance of the bay. The order did not come a minute too soon, though the majority of us were so worked up by the excitement of the fight that we would never have noticed that it was high time for us to quit.

We held on this course for about two hours, and then, as the sky had fortunately clouded over, we hauled our wind and stood due south to give our pursuers a chance of passing us in the darkness. They would never expect us to turn south, so when they missed us at daylight they would naturally look for us to the northward if they continued the chase. That was our theory. What they actually did I cannot say, for we never saw them again.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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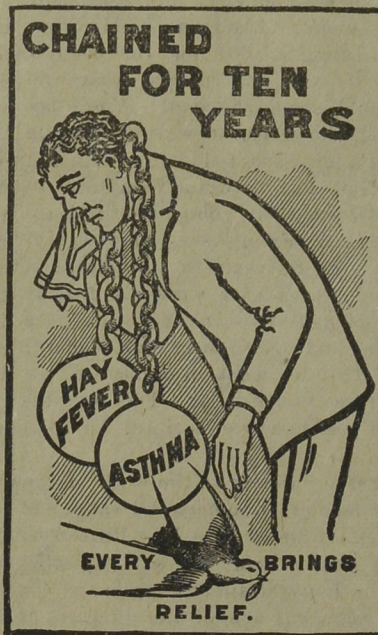
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