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## JOHN TOPP, PIRATE.

By WEATHERBY CHESNEY and ALICK MUNRO.

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weird, unearthly voice from the murkiest corner of the cell. "So they've given you water in pichers and then caused you to spill the water and break the pichers in the hurry of your entry! Oh, ho, ho! 'Tis a merry jest. They're funny dogs, these noble Spaniards."

"I started to my feet and stared hard into the corner, but the darkness was too thick for me to see what manner of thing it was that had addressed us. "Oh, ho, ho!" cackled the voice again. "More flesh to frizzle and crackle in the flames, though there isn't over-much fat on it. More skin to be torn by the pichers, more stout limbs to wear the iron boot! Ah, ha, ha! More sweet work for the kind and gentle Spaniard!"

"Who are you," cried Alec sternly, "man or ghoul, to take such delight in horrors?"

"Oh, ho, ho! It's the name you'd like, my masters? But they know that, and I'll not tell you. I publish no autobiography till I'm racked for it. 'Tisn't safe. Walls have ears, and recanting in the instrument room—where they've got sawdust on the floor, remember—is wearisome to the flesh. But," he added, with evil glee, "you'll know that better by and by."

A shudder of loathing ran through me at his words, and I trembled as a man does when the demon of fear takes hold of him. And yet I do not usually show it when I am afraid. But this man was a very high priest of horror.

"Well, friend," said Alec after a moment's silence, "at least you will come to the light and let us have a look at you. There's no danger in that." "Oh, ho, ho! Been gazing at the daylight, have you? Eyes not attuned to the darkness, eh? Ah, ha, ha! The noble Spaniard will teach you how to see like barn owls before you've drunk down all the gentle medicine for sick souls that they will offer you. Are you tough, my masters?"

A bony claw seized me by the leg, and I could feel the hard fingers pressing into my flesh like iron talons. "Ho, ho! Good! Good!" he cried as he felt the toll hardened muscles. "Here are good, stout thews and sinews to be tamed!" And he rubbed his hands and jangled his fetters joyously.

"They'll not set the little pot belled knave to man the handspike when they lay you on the rack. You'll have the greater honor. It will be the tall, lusty one with cross eyes. I used to know his stroke well. Ah, me! I'm getting an old, worn man now, and the pot belled racker serves my turn. Ah, ha, ha! D'ye take? Serves—my—turn! Oh, ho, ho!"

The cell rang loud with his ghastly merriment. "The poor fellow's mad," whispered Alec to me. "Tortured out of his reason perhaps. Still he's an Englishman and may be able to give me news of my father." And he added aloud, "My good man, did you ever meet or hear of Captain Ireland, who sailed out of the port of London for Manoa and was taken by the Spaniards on these coasts?"

"Oh, ho, ho! Ah, ha, ha!" burst out the unearthly cackling again. "Captain Ireland, is it? Aye, the gentle, merciful hands of the noble Spaniard were laid upon his stubborn shoulders,



"Ho, ho! Good! Good!" he cried. "Here are good stout thews and sinews!"

and his proud back was bowed. Aye, a haughty man was Captain Harry Ireland, but the wily Spaniards brought him low enough, down even to the ground—cross, you lubbers, there's a spy at the window—where he repented of his sins and swore to be good to the end."

And the man began mumbling Latin prayers, and not another word could we get from him, though Alec questioned him hard.

At length we had to give up the attempt to learn anything from our mad cell fellow. So, weary we addressed ourselves to sleep, and the Latin mutterings from the corner of our dungeon were the lullaby that invited us to slumber.

### CHAPTER XII.

Scarcely so it seemed, had I closed my eyes when there was a clanking at the door as its bolts and bars were withdrawn, and a dozen armed soldiers trooped into the room. It was still dark, but one of them carried a lantern, and by its light I saw that they were all splashed with fresh mud and now evidently been traveling recently and rapidly.

"Get up, you English dogs," said one of them roughly. "Smartly now! You're wanted."

"What for, senor?" said I wearily. "What for? How does that concern you? You do as you're told without asking the reason. Come, up you get, you lazy rogues!" And he began to use his heavy boot freely.

"You're to march out of Caracas at once," said one of the other Spaniards, "and may keep your heretical skins whole for a day or two longer if you have luck."

"From Caracas?" said Alec. "Is that where we are?"

"Certainly, senor," replied the other, with a mocking bow, "and I hope you like our town."

"Oh, ho, ho!" chuckled the old man. The Spaniard turned to him. "You are to come, too, old crook bones. Are you too lame to walk to La Guayra?"

"Oh, ho, ho! But are we going to La Guayra, mostly wily senor?"

"Certainly. Do you think a Spanish caballero would trouble to lie to a hound like you?"

"Why, if it's to La Guayra I'll make a shift to hobble so far, but I'd rather ride o' muleback."

"Ride!" said the soldier, with a rude laugh. "I warrant you could hobble twice the distance so that it lay away from your prison."

"Ah, ha, ha! You've a pretty wit, senor, a pretty wit. But it's the sweet salt air I wish to sniff. The sea breeze is meat and drink to old mariners such as I."

He scrambled to his maimed, distorted legs. One of them was shorter than the other and that other knotted and gnarled like some old willow tree.

"But you'll let me bid farewell to my pot belled little racker, senores? He'll be half beside himself with grief

at losing such an old boon companion as I."

"Had I my own way, sirrah," said the soldier contemptuously, "I'd break your wry old neck for a useless incumbent. Sense and strength are both gone from you. But my orders are to set you to an oar along with these two lustier knaves. So come along." And he kicked him into the courtyard and bade us follow.

"The galleys!" said Alec, with a shrug. "Repented for the present!" And he did as he was bidden.

I followed, and presently we were linked to a great chain gang with a lot of other prisoners, among whom were several of the Bristol Merchant's crew, who greeted us kindly. Job Trehalion was in front of me, scar and grin complete as of yore.

"Brave news, Master Topp," he whispered. "What is it?" said I. "Haven't you heard? There's tidings of an English ship that's harrying the coasts, an Indian spy has brought word that her beak's turned 'orst here. There were an armada lying in the roads a week ago, but it's sailed west, an there's only a carrack on a brace of galleys now. An as one of them last bairn got a man aboard her we're to work her sweeps. Brave news, bairn! It, Master Topp? Once at sea, who knows what me may do?"

He rubbed his hands and grinned till I feared for the integrity of his features. "Attempt nothing rashly," said I, for I had not overmuch faith in Job's judgment and feared he might start an outbreak which would end in death to us all. "Attempt nothing whatever till Captain Ireland gives the word. He has a headpiece worth ten of yours and mine, Job."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Job warmly, "that he has. An when he gives the sign he'll have the lot of us at his back, no fear."

Then the cavalcade was put into motion, and further conversation became impossible. We passed through the still streets, by churches and houses and gloomy convents and great public buildings and so on to the batteries and fortifications, where there was strict parley with the sentries before we were let out. The old man, who had been dragging himself painfully along behind me, sank down on the muddy road to snatch a moment's rest, and through some pity for his condition I bade him climb on to my back. Without further ado he scrambled, chuckling and crying out to the soldier who had been leading him, and at any rate an ass, after all. This I thought was somewhat ungracious.

The double gates were opened, and we trooped on to a narrow, well kept road that the frowning culverters could have swept with iron hail for a score of perches. We passed through other gates and other drawbridges thrown across natural cliffs and saw other heavily gunned batteries beside them, making the position one of such enormous strength that 20 good men could have held it against an army.

During the two hours' tramp the sun sprang up from behind the eastern hills, and by the time we entered La Guayra it was broad daylight. "The old man, whom I had set down from my shoulders, cried loudly for a breakfast. He wasn't going to row on an empty belly. Oh, ho, ho! Not he! Indeed! They might thumbscrew his hands to the oar, but he wouldn't put an ounce of weight on it, no, not even if they twisted a knotted cord round his temples and gave him backward and forward with that."

Little notice, however, was taken of his vapors save to bestow a curse or a blow when his importunities grew too noisy. We were hustled roughly into boats and ferried across to the galley which lay straining at her anchor in the road.

"She's pierced for 30 sweeps aside," said Alec, who had been counting the rowers that meant unless we are to be singularly undermanned."

"There be three more boat loads coming off," observed Job Trehalion. "Two for us and one for the smaller galley ahead there," said I. "And look, there are a host of slaves and soldiers on the shore ready to embark. But where the carcass, I wonder?"

"Hull down to'nard, master," said one of the other Englishmen. "Way enough!" sang out the officer in charge of the boat. "In oars, and mind you slaves don't topple overboard. I don't want to lose you till you've done some work."

"Aye," cried the old man, "Spanish lubbers that you are! Let the English seamen go first and show you the way!" And he got a scabbard bound across the face to quiet him. She was a galley of the first class, and from her keen steel beak to her



"Crack!" came the driver's whip.

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gilded coach she was for a galley as a craft as ever ran to windward against a nor'easter. But from our coign of disadvantage we did not look upon her with much appreciation. She had been lying idle for a full twelve months and yet had scarcely had time to sweeten. I never sat on anything narrower of rougher than her row benches.

Each of us English was stationed at the end of an oar, a post of honor if there can be such a distinction for slaves who are chained to their work, and the five other places were manned by rapacious landmen, of whom there seemed to be a very liberal supply.

A soldier commandant and five soldier officers, mighty fine armor clad gentlemen all, took possession of the coach and cabin on the spar deck. A handful of dirty, lubberly sailors and a company of soldiers were stationed forward, and when a few handfuls of maize burgeo had been distributed among us slaves the drivers on the gangway cracked their whips, and we swung out our oars and got under way.

The galley had been pretty lively as she plunged at her anchor, and the Spanish cutpurses and cutthroats beside us were beginning to feel uncomfortable, but when she got some way on and the motion became easier they thought their qualms would pass away, and so they broke out into a monotonous chant which marked time for the rowing.

But their song did not last long. By rapid degrees the "cheep-cheep" of the tholes drowned it as the long rolling swell of the Caribbean sea rocked us up and down, and the swarthy faces of the rogues became sallow as old iron.

And then began a scene of misery that sickens me even now to think of. The poor wretches in the agony of their sickness would faint have dropped the oars, but the merciless drivers lashed them, lashed us, lashed all within reach. The helm was put up to run along the coast, and the beam roll made the sufferers sicker. They could not do a doer's worth of work and in their loathing bade the drivers fling them overboard.

We English could not each do the task of six and cursed the drivers for our sheared stripes. The officers in the stern swore haphazard at all they could clap eyes on. And above all the hellish tumult and discord rose the weird unearthly "Oh, ho, ho!" and "Ah, ha, ha!" of the old man.

"Crack!" came the driver's whip across the old man's bare shoulders. "Best keep your wind to yourself, old prophet," growled a stout fellow who sat near him, "seeing that we're chained up here like dogs an can't stir a fist to right ourselves with."

"I tell you, good fellow," replied the old man earnestly, "before another day is spent you shall drive a steel ax through these Spanish headpieces." "I'd do it blithely, old man," said the other. "Aye, or through six or through 60 if it came to that! But there, you're babbling. They've driven your old brain crazy, poor master, with their torturings."

"Babbings!" cried the old man fiercely. "I tell you, Jan Pengony, that as surely as your back is a mass of sores today so surely shall you pay back a sword thrust for every whip cut they have given you."

"In the fend's name how did you learn mine? I never set eyes on you before. Is it magic, master?" "Ah, ha! Magic! Oh, ho, ho! Aye, magic's the word, Jan! I've lived long among these very good friends the Spaniards, and the devil, who is their patron saint, has taught me many things. You needn't cross yourself, Jan. They say he doesn't like it."

"The Lord be between me and harm!" exclaimed the man devoutly. "Ah, ha, ha, ha!" I could hear the scared sailor mumbling a strange mixture of hard words and scraps of prayer to keep off the evil spirit, and I more than half shared his alarm. But, though I had no wish to be beheld to any one who worked magic, still I could not help the feeling of elation which the uncanny old prophet's words roused in me. By virtue of his powers the old man appeared to guess the thoughts which were simmering in my mind, for presently he sang out, "Well, Jack, my brassy giant, are you ready for a cut at your oppressors?"

"Fence, old man," said I. "If the soldiers hear you, they'll smell nuttin' and fire munnance into the lot of us." "Oh, ho, ho! No fear, Jack. A Spanish hidalgo doesn't know our heathen tongue."

"Maybe not," said I, "but there's no

magic in being prudent. And another thing, old man, I warn you not to practise your devilish arts on me, for I know Latin, and if you're a warlock you'll be finding yourself in uncomfortable quarters."

"Oh, ho, ho! It's well for you, Jack, that the Spaniard is too fine a gentleman to cumber himself with barbarous English. Had my worthy friends on the poop heard your insolence—setting yourself up as an exorcist, ha, ha!—you wouldn't have escaped a beating. Verily it was great presumption on your part. Know, Jack, that none but a noble Spaniard with three crafty torturers trailing on his heels can quiet the devil of which I am possessed now, if that excellent devil wishes to speak. But at present he is dumb, Jack, so get on with your toil, for though we are heading for the place of deliverance there are many weary leagues left to row before we reach it."

Then, with his teeth close set and a constant stream of muttering and subdued laughter forcing its way between them, he swung to his oar with an energy that his wasted muscles seemed to be incapable of supplying.

The old man's words filled me with hope and the powers that inspired them with fear; so, unwilling to be further beholden to his art, I kept my tongue quiet and looked out to seaward.

Keeping even pace with us was a large carrack of about 500 tons, pierced for a great quantity of ordnance and crammed to the bulwarks with soldiers. Hanging on her windward quarter was another galley, rowing four oars carried a heavy fighting crew. With a sinking heart I recognized that the three of us would be too strong for the Englishman, for, though I knew that one of his lads was a match for eight or maybe ten of these glittering Spaniards any day, still against odds of 50 to 1 his chance was hopeless. He might beat us off or perhaps even sink us, but capture us—never.

And so the old man's words seemed to me to be but foolhardiness after all. And with that thought I once more tore at my oar in sullen gloom.

Toward nightfall we had a rest. The galley's sails were hoisted to catch the rising breeze, and so, drawing the oars a trifle inboard, we slipped the handles under the gangway, leaving the shingling blades cocking up in the air on either side of her. All round us were sickness and misery. The sun sank behind a reef of purple cloud, and the freshening wind began to hiss and shriek more keenly through the oar blades.

The sea got up, the rain poured against us in cutting sheets, and squall after squall tore from the inky blackness above. The galley was allowed to run under foresail alone, and a course was shaped for El Pueblo del Norte, on the north side of Margarita. But the lubberly soldier Spaniards had not known enough to keep a good reckoning while daylight lasted and so, holding too much to the island till we had almost passed it. And then as she would not

(To be Continued.)

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