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LEVER BROTHERS LIMITED, TORONTO 1002



The Sunlight Maids are through their washing by noon—that's the Sunlight way

**JOHN TOPP, PIRATE.**

By WEATHERBY CHESNEY and ALICK MUNRO.

(Copyright, 1900, by Weatherby Chesney and Alick Munro.)

The scorching sun above us, arched his brazen course in fiery splendor, began at last to verge toward the distant way water line. The dancing air grew cooler and was freshened by a welcome breeze from the sea. Cautiously we drew out from among the plantains and, looking sharply around to make sure that no one spied us, crept all four back to the knoll and once more peeped from beneath the graceful fern screens.

The tide had not yet turned, and a couple of Spaniards were fastening a stout stake in a hole, which they had scooped beneath the outermost of the ripples. They laughed and joked over their work as though it were some holiday diversion and every now and then gave the post a shake to try whether it was secure.

When they had finished, one of them must needs lean his back up against the wood and pretend in pantomime



Down they brought Willie Trehallon and that the tide was rising around him, and, to judge from the shouts of laughter which proceeded from unseen observers under the cliff, his companions found something intensely humorous in this grotesque clowning.

Presently there was a shout that the flood was beginning to make, and down they brought Willie Trehallon and fished him to the stake. The other ten Englishmen were made fast to the outlying trees of a thicket that ran down to the edge of the beach, and when they were all secured Don Miguel once more addressed them:

"I asked you just now to build me a ship that would take me away from this island, and you refused. Well, senores, there are consequences to that refusal, and I am going to acquaint you with them. You may think I shall punish you today, but such is not my plan. I am simply going to let you enjoy the sight of a man drowning by slow inches before your eyes in order that you may have the opportunity of observing what a peculiarly unpleasant exit from this world such a death is. Tomorrow I shall again ask one of you to serve me. If in spite of the lesson of today he refuses, the rest of you shall see him slowly choked by the rising waters. The next day I shall try another, and so on. It will be interesting to see how many times I shall have to repeat this pleasing spectacle, but pray do not hurry yourselves to come to a decision. The island, senores, is a pleasant one, and I shall not be distressed if my play should run even for ten nights. It is a thousand pities that the audience will necessarily be diminished by one at each performance. Adios, senores!"

And with that he strode away. Some of the other Spaniards lingered awhile and then followed him, and the rest, to the number of perhaps 40, lit a fire and prepared to see the tragedy to its close. When the kindly shades of night began to steal over the island, we crept from our eyes. A bush covered slope led from the cliff down to the beach, some hundred yards or so from where the prisoners stood, and down this we scrambled, avoiding carefully every little twig that might betray us by its snapping and forcing our very breaths to come lightly lest they should stir the leaves and give the alarm.

The breeze had dropped, the stars

very ago still, and the gabble of the Spaniards' voices came to us softly through the silence. A slight mist had blotted out the stars above, and the only light we had was the fitful glare of the bonfire. It burned dully for the most part, giving out dense clouds of smoke that rolled slowly upward till they were lost in the dark night, but every now and then some one would give the logs a stir, and the darting flames would for a moment send a lurid radiance over the whole scene.

There in the creek we could see Willie Trehallon, with the waters already up to his chest and his smooth, bald head shining like a mirror in the flailing firelight. Round the fire were grouped the Spaniards, chatting and smoking and, standing out dark against the uncertain blaze, were the ten forms of the bound Englishmen.

To cut the prisoners' bonds without at the same time drawing from them a shout of surprise was work to make the least nervous fingers tremble. Alec crept up to the first and, whispering to him not to move a finger till he was told, cut the cords that bound him to the tree. I went to the second and had just drawn my knife across the first cord when one of the Spaniards, whose ears were sharper than those of his comrade, saw the glint of the blade and suspicious sounds and stroled up to see what was going on. Motionless we stood as tree trunks, and, though he peered curiously into the thicket, he could not see us, for at that moment, fortunately, the fire was burning dim. He was only half satisfied, though, so he sat him down within a fathom of the feet of the man I had been engaged upon and there remained.

Heavens, how slowly the leaden minutes dragged themselves away! Time had never seemed so long before.

Every now and again, when the laughing talk of the Spaniards lulled, I could hear the monotonous lap-lap of the rising tide, which told that Willie Trehallon's respite was growing every moment more fatally less. I could see him, too, when the dancing firelight fell upon the waters, and, though his stolid face showed no sign of fear, still his solitary eye roved the shore unceasingly, backward and forward, looking for the help which, it might be, would not come in time. The suspense was awful.

Suddenly a voice from beside the fire called out, "Pepe, you rascal, come and join in a madrigal."

Pepe rose, stretched himself, heaved a pebble playfully at one of the bound men and went.

As the first words of the watchers' madrigal rose round the fire I drew my knife across the second man's thong. Alec loosened the third man and I the fourth, and then a blaze of summer lightning flashed through the sky and for a moment lit up the smooth, shining head of our boatswain, whose chin was now being lapped by the hungry ripples.

There was a shout. Some prying Spaniard had spied us in the brief glare of the lightning flash. The madrigal ceased in the middle of a bar and then—confusion!

CHAPTER XVI.  
That telltale lightning flash came just a moment too soon and put an end to any hope of surprising the Spaniards by a rush from the darkness. The other six Englishmen were released as fast as our swords could cut their lashings, and the band of us made for the interrupted songsters round the fire.

Fortunately for us, few of the Spaniards were armed, and before our fierce onset they gave way at first like a flock of frightened sheep. The ten prisoners had seized whatever weapons they could lay their hands on—swords, daggers, logs of wood even—and were hacking and buffeting right and left like maniacs. But the Spaniards began to rally, and as the alarm spread re-enforcements came flocking from the cave. And those, of course, were fully armed.

We were in a tight place. "Jack, Jack!" I heard Alec shout. "Loose Willie Trehallon and then run the boat down! The rest of us will keep these mosquitoes back! Quick, though, for the lives of us all!"

Hitting our right and left, I got clear and waded into the water, but it was a full minute before I managed to set our old boatswain adrift. He was sobbing like a hysterical schoolgirl in his excitement, and tears of sheer joy were chafing one another down the furrows of his cheek.

me to save your own skin. It's no use my trying. I must just drown in my own depth of water. But thanks kindly all the same."

"Not yet, Willie. You're heavy, but not too heavy for Jack Topp to carry; so we'll just ride you out of it. Besides, the water will help to keep you up."

With that I hoisted him on my back, holding him with my left hand and keeping my sword arm free.

We did not gain the boat without trouble, and my sword streamed afresh before we reached her. Two hands plumped on to the floor boards like a sack of grain, and desperately I strained every muscle to get her afloat. Inch by inch it was done, while the fight surged nearer and nearer to us. Every man of the English was far too busy to come and help me, but at last I got her into four feet of water. Rushing back, I joined in the furious battle, shouting to our lads to gain the shore as each man could.

One by one they scrambled into the boat, and the Spaniards followed shoulder deep into the water. But they could not touch us there. Two hands were lopped off as they clung to the gunwale, and then a few vigorous, shoves with the paddles took us into deep water.

"Hasta manana, Senor Don Miguel del Casamaro, late of Whitty," sung out Willie Trehallon, raising his round head with a great effort above the gunwale, and then he shot into the shadow of the opposite shore out of sight of the Spaniards and lay on our oars to count heads and examine our damages. There were 13 men in the boat. Where were the other two?

"Davy Griffiths is gone," said one of the men. "I seed 'im, with a foot o' his back, beat out the brains o' the chap as put it there."

"Joe the Cooper is killed, too," said another. "He an the Spaniards' cargo intended fell foul o' one another an wrestled on the ground. The don had a dirk, Joe nothing but his bare hands. The don carved Joe's hide into a fishing net, an Joe tore the don's throat out wif his teeth."

"It was a warmish corner while it lasted. 'An we've all more or less, scatted. You've a rib there peeping at the starlight."

"As you've a nasty hole in that nether arm."

"Tim here has half an ear shredded away, an Jan Pegony's countenance is opeener than ever natur' made it."

"Where's the little cordwainer?"

"Sorely wounded, poor lad. He's lying senseless here wif Willie Trehallon in the bilge. This here child on his head needs a surgeon, an' an' pack thread to call it sound again."

"Aye, an Sam's beside him wif a hale in the ribs. Sam's done, I'm thinking."

"Let me bind this rag round your thigh, Master Topp. Got that cut in the last rush, did you? You're bleeding, like a pig with salt, but an' scratched? The wonder o' it! How did you do it, sir?"

"No fault o' the captain's," put in Willie Trehallon, "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 owa again and give me one. Willen, 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 wif 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 noddard. Make land 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 to 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 foamstone 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 stranded and as 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 sordid 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 bil-

l, 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."

"Master Topp, a lot can be done in two days or even in one. I thought o' that yesterday when I heard your plover's call from the cliff. I knew that your old friend Don Miguel meant of-ther to hang me up or to drown me by inches. I'd heard him say as much. Now, hanging's quick an easy work when both trees an ropes is handy, but drowning by inches needs a rising tide, an that wouldn't be till nightfall. An so, thinking as them who 'peewhit' might be in small force an might like darkness to help them, I just bully-ragged the Spaniard into letting me wall."

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er," said one of the men promptly, and a deep voiced assent hummed round the assembly.

"They bain't got much taking in that cave o' theirs," said Willie Trehallon, "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.

"Hut 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?"

"I hope 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 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 fall 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 as it is. 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 soundly 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 had yet some when men have hope, who shall say that any quest is vain?

CHAPTER XVII.  
Waking when the morning sun was up in the east we were glad to find that 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 had not been 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 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 Trehallon, 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 e'en to fancy ourselves hakey fish an swallow the bait raw."

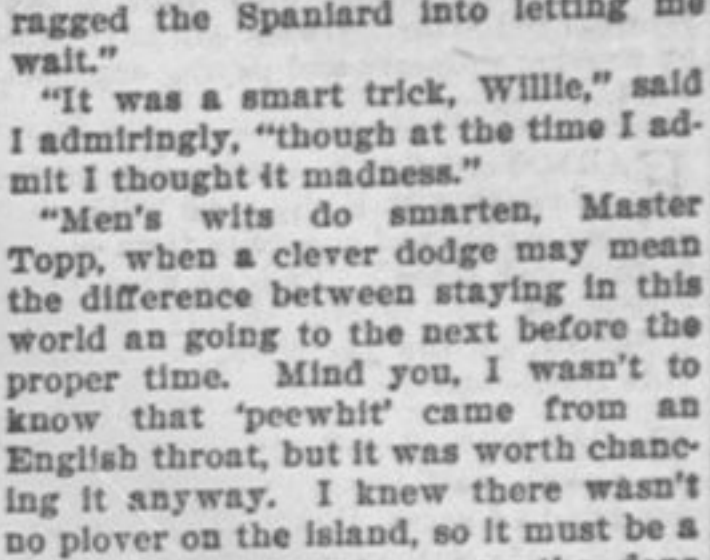
The chief thing, however, which made it imperative that our stay on the island should be brief was the complete lack of fresh water. Search high, search low, we could find neither stream nor spring, and had it not been that there were a few rain filled pools lying here and there among the rocks we should 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 Trehallon and I had a talk.

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