

JOHN TOPP, PIRATE

By Weatherby Chesney and Alick Munro.

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CHAPTER X.

Next sunrise saw 50 of us ashore. We took nothing with us but our arms and accoutrements, 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 retraced their own footprints, and man had not as yet penetrated their solitude. To force a passage was a work of time and infinitely hard labor. It was hew and hack, back and bow, wherever the big trees flourished, for the lanes 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 56 cut the lazy lot of the 21 who were left behind to guard the Bristol Merchant.

On the second day out a piece of misfortune befell us which left us without the guide on whom we had relied to lead us to the golden city. Our pagan allowed himself to be bitten by a venomous serpent and so died. It was like breaking our compass at sea, as without this brown fellow for guide we could only drift, wandering hither, wandering thither, up mountains whose tops were capped with a hood of glistening snow, through ravines where the surging waters hardly left us standing room, now making bridges of felled trunks, now twisting ropes of tough lianes, now killing a deer for dinner and now taking a great delight in rolling over a spotted jaguar who had marked one of us for his own meal.

It was weary work, though, and there were times when we almost gave up the quest in despair, for often after a long day of painful hacking and hewing we had to go all the way back again to get round a swampy morass or a precipitous ravine. The disheartening aimlessness of our toil went very near to quenching the fires of the golden beacon which each man's hopes held up before his eyes.

Occasionally we would come across a village of Caribs or other savages, and, though they generally showed fight at first, as soon as they learned that we were enemies to the Spaniards they at once became as friendly as possible. Job Trehalion was our interpreter, for, having a fancy for giving orders to his servant in his own language, he had picked up a great deal of the pagan speech on the voyage out, and so now by a mixture of scrappy sentences and dumb show he was able to parley with the savages. As none of the rest of us knew a word of their talk, Job was immensely proud of his accomplishment, and by dint of practicing it on every possible occasion he eventually became quite a good interpreter, or at least if he misinterpreted we were not competent to point out his errors.

Weary, weary days they were, and utterly profitless seemed our search through these trackless forests. Every tribe of Indians we met made signs that they knew Manoa, and willingly pointed out the direction in which they thought it lay, but a search always brought us to another village, whose inhabitants would in their turn declare that the golden city lay in a wholly different direction.

And so we were sent to the vale beyond the mountain chain, from it to the great river which lies half a moon's journey toward the setting sun, from that to the fire mountain, whose snowy tippet never melts, and from that again toward the great northern sea. Weary, weary days!

But running through all this concert of discouragement there was one recurring harmony which heartened us and kept us constant to our search. All the pagans with whom we spoke of the golden city gave the same tale in the main, though they garnished it with an infinitude of conflicting embellishments. One would say that the king was white like us, another that he was bronzed colored like themselves; this one might say that he ate flesh, and that one would swear that his food was wholly vegetable, but all agreed that the city lay by a great lake or on

an island in the midst of it and that the worship of the people somehow centered on the lake. And, greatest spur of all to us hungry gold hunters, all earnestly affirmed that the treasures of the city were beyond the power of man to count.

And why should we disbelieve the tale? Cortes and his conquistadores found just such another city and just such another worship in Mexico, as also did Pizarro and his crew of bandits in Peru. No European had ever trod those paths before them, and when their ships touched the shore of the new world they had no better evidence than an Indian tale to show them what empires lay beyond. Were we to be more unbelieving or more far-seeing than they and to declare that the great men the pagans told us about

Some of us might be able to flounder through the racks and falls and rapids and so come out on the Spaniards farther down the river. If we could only take them unawares from behind, we might get the better of them yet. And so, with 40 of the stout fellows after me, I slipped into the tearing current.

Sometimes we swam, sometimes we waded, sometimes we were borne along like so many helpless logs of wood, down cataracts and through eddies, and of those that escaped drowning all were bruised and battered till their flesh was like a jelly or their bones broke like water rotted twigs. And of the survivors, though it is wormwood even now to speak it, as the current carried their half-drowned bodies ashore not one escaped instant or subsequent capture.

CHAPTER XI.

The Spanish gold mine was a hell in the midst of a paradise, a loathsome canker on the fairest piece of earth's bosom. The air was loaded with sweet perfumes and fowl with Castilian oaths. It murmured with the songs of beautiful birds and shivered with the crackings of slave drivers' whips. The humming music of the waterfall was marred by the discord of clanking fetters. Nature had done her best. Man, as if in jealousy, had done his worst. It was the garden of Eden, but in the midst of it yawned a loathsome chasm, girdled with unsightly debris and alive with swarms of filthy, ragged slaves.

For eight horrid months Alec and I and 20 of our men worked in the chain gangs at these mines, and of the torments we endured no words of mine are strong enough to give conception. To the human fiends who were our taskmasters no pleasure was like that of making an Englishman suffer pain and no spectacle so humorous as to see him undergo indignity. They drove us like cattle to the work; they made us toil when the fierce heat of the day would almost choke the lungs; they fed us on putrid meat and sour maize burgoo when sweet goat's flesh and delicious fruit clusters were to be had as cheaply; they jailed us at night in a squalid, filth-floored hovel and chained us up like wild beasts, so that in the end they took from us even the power to restore our jaded energies with sleep.

One day, a moonless night we broke the fetters and tried to escape. Once on a rainy day we rose on the guards and made for the woods, but both efforts were in vain, and those that did not get cut down or shot out of their misery were flogged till the bleeding flesh hung in shreds from their backs. And of our fellow slaves, the mild eyed Indian peasants marveled in stupid wonder at our foolish daring, and the fierce eyed Spanish thieves and murderers gloated over our recapture and punishment.

Tortured, reviled, despised, we lived for eight months within sight of the beauties of a paradise, enduring the agonies of a hell, and then came a change.

We were summoned one morning not to work, but to toe a line before the treasury. Great skin covered packs of metal, as much as a man could stagger under, were brought out and strapped on our shoulders. Then we were all linked to a chain and driven off down a narrow trail. Where it led to we did not know, and no one would tell us, but long though the way was, we marked every inch of it with sweat from our brows, with blood from our blistered feet and with muttered curses against our merciless captors. Could we but have snatched arms and liberty for a few moments there would have been a bitter reckoning among those tyrants.

They knew it, too, and taunted us with our helplessness, but the light of hatred in our eyes must have scared them a little, else why did they half starve us if not to keep down the growth of superabundant muscle? High mettled horses are not fed too well when they are set to do farm work.

After a march of 20 days, during which one poor Minehead lad died through sheer exhaustion, we arrived through view of the blessed sea once more, and the sight of it sent new energy pulsing through the veins of every man of us. This our Spanish masters observed and grimly bade us moderate our joy, for the inquisition had need of us, heretics maddened that we were.

And then they laughed at their own wit and playfully flicked us with the slave whips.

But the freedom of the sea breeze had entered into our brains, and we were sanguine, though heaven knows there was but little cause for hope. The man next behind me in the chain gang, whose shoulders were smarting from one of those humorous lash cuts, whispered, "We'll get to windward of these devils yet, Master Topp, and then—"

I nodded my head, and absurd though it seemed, I had a feeling that he was right and that we should have our turn soon.

Dipping into a deep ravine where the tree tops arched above our heads, we camped for the night beneath their cooling shade, and perhaps because some spark of pity touched them, perhaps only because they were tired of torturing us, the Spaniards did not hot us from trying to cool our hot, bleeding feet with the juice of such leaves as were within our reach. With but little sleep we were through the night and next day passed the fortification and entered the town.

Treasure trains were evidently not an everyday occurrence, for the whole town turned out to look at us, and when they saw we were English a movement went through the crowd, and the hootings and revillings made the echoes ring again. Of noble spirited pity for a fallen foe there was no trace. All faces were cruelly exultant. Even the women laughed with mocking glee at our wretchedness and bade



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was a myth, a will-o'-the-wisp or, worse still, a sorcerer who could vanish at his pleasure?

We canvassed the question often over our evening campfire. Willie Trehalion said we were fools and that we should well deserve a Spanish halter when at last we felt it chafing our necks. But the rest of us believed still and so held sturdily on.

Thus we traveled and travelled for a year and seven months and a week and two days, till we came to a small valley, barren as a Norfolk sand bank and cut up by a brawling riuilet, which sprawled from side to side across it. The valley was bounded on either side by tall, frowning cliffs, which it would have puzzled a rat to climb, and it lay on the western flank of a range of mountains running north and south, which we were trying to cross to what rumor said was the certain site of Manoa, on the opposite side.

For a day and a half we tramped up this stony desert and then came to a wall of rock at the head, so steep that the stream which leaped over it was torn by the air feeds to fragments in its fall and dropped into the pool at the bottom as a rainbow stricken shower of shimmering mist.

We looked round in dismay. Willie Trehalion took off his skin skullcap, laid it on a rock, sat down beside it, and screwing his mouth up into a knot began to whistle dolefully. Job, as usual, grinned.

Alec went forward to reconnoiter, hoping to find some practicable spot, but in vain. "Back again" was the word, and with tightened belts, too, for our provisions were all consumed, and there was no chance of getting any more till we came again to the wooded country we had passed through two days before.

Such a march, fasting, was enough to make the cheekiest of us shudder, but no one grumbled; there was nothing to be gained by it. So with an empty feeling about the waistband and the comforting knowledge that that feeling would soon become a gnawing pain back we trudged, until we came to the pass where a narrow ledge of rock, jutting out from the steep cliff and overhanging the water, had formed our path on the way up. None but a sailor or a goat could have passed along it, and, as single file was imperative, our procession was straggling.

We were toilfully feeling our way along this dangerous mouse walk when a shout of dismay from in front told us that some accident had happened to the leaders. The jutting elbow of rock prevented us from seeing what was wrong, but the word was quickly passed down the line that a large body of Spaniards held the open ground in which the track ended and had captured Alec (who was leading) with a noosed cord before he could draw iron in his own defense.

Willie Trehalion and I were bringing up the rear. The rest struggled back to us and asked what was to be done.

"They call on us to surrender," said the lad who had been close on Alec's heels.

"Knowing that there's no food here, an knowing we can't come to honest blows," added Willie Trehalion, polishing his head thoughtfully, "the dons have us on the hip, Master Topp."

"What do you advise, Willie?" said I.

"Don't know," he answered. "I'd liefer die, though, than yield to the Spanish devils."

"Quick, then!" I cried. "Follow me, those who dare, and let the rest guard the path."

It was a desperate chance that I tried, but it was just possible that

Blood Troubles: Cancer, Scrofula, Old Sores, Rheumatism, Contagious Blood Poison, Chronic Ulcers.

As the blood contains all the elements necessary to sustain life, it is important that it be kept free of all impurities, or it becomes a source of disease, poisoning instead of nourishing the body, and loss of health is sure to follow. Some poisons enter the blood from without, through the skin by absorption, or inoculation; others from within, as when waste products accumulate in the system and ferment, allowing disease germs to develop and be taken into the circulation. While all blood troubles have one common origin, each has some peculiarity to distinguish it from the other. Contagious Blood Poison, Scrofula, Cancer, Rheumatism, Eczema and other blood diseases can be distinguished by a certain sore, ulcer, eruption or inflammation appearing on the skin. Every blood disease shows sooner or later on the outside and on the weakest part of the body, or where it finds the least resistance. Many mistake the sore or outward sign for the real disease, and attempt a cure by the use of salves, liniments and other external applications. Valuable time is lost and no permanent benefit derived from such treatment.

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our drivers "lash their cattle into a froth for the last stage."

And at this there came into my eye that which all the lashings could not bring, for in my folly I had fancied that a woman's heart must needs be soft.

The gold was unstrapped from our weary shoulders and stored in the treasury, and then those of us who were English, all except two that was, were marched to a building whose grim and forbidding front needed no signpost to tell us what went on within its stern white walls. We passed through an iron studded gate, whose dismal clanking as it closed behind us sounded like a warning voice telling that life and hope were now barred out from us forever, and so across a courtyard into which opened a great bare room with high, closely barred windows where for a little time we were left to our own reflections, and these were none of the pleasant.

Before nightfall a guard of soldiers came and unlinked us from our chains, Alec and I, as the leaders of our party, were separated from the rest of the brave fellows. A small supply of water in dirty earthen jars and a handful of coarse broken crusts were given to each of us. Then we were led down a flight of well worn stone steps; a door was opened; we were sent headlong forward into the darkness; the door swung to behind us, was bolted with a click and a double snap, and the footsteps of our jailers echoed along the passages and died away to silence.

At first the dungeon seemed to us black as a slave driver's conscience, but gradually we noticed that a faint light was coming in through a heavily grated window in the wall. Bruised and shaken with our fall, we lay on the pavement and wondered what would be the next evil to come to us.

"Oh, ho, ho! Ah, ha, ha!" laughed a weird, unearthly voice from the murkiest corner of the cell. "So they've given you water in pitchers and then caused you to spill the water and break the pitchers 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 pinchers, 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 ghou, 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 rearing 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 jocosely. "They'll not set the little pot bellied 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 bellied 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. "Cap-



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

tain Ireland, is it? Aye, the gentle, merciful hands of the noble Spaniard were laid upon his stubborn shoulders, 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 with the toll of our long march, we addressed ourselves to sleep, and the Latin mutterings from the corner of our dungeon were the lullaby that invited us to slumber.

(To be continued next Friday.)

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