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AN ADVENTURE AT SEA.

WE were about eight hundred miles south of the Cape of Good Hope, and our ship's head pointed nearly due east. "Twelve knots an hour," says I to the skipper, in reply to "How much is she making?" The dripping log line was rolled up and the time-glass placed away in the pinnace. An extra pull was taken on the braces, the yards pressed hard against the stays, and right well did the old Marathon lie over, from the heavy breeze that swelled our canvas to its greatest tention. I have the log again.

"How much now?" says the skipper. "Twelve and a half, sir."

"I guess that is about all we can get out of her with this wind; that extra pull gave her the other half knot."

In ten days after passing Kerguelen's Land the high and irregular coast of Australia was raised from the masthead by our first mate, Mr. Bolter, who shouted the glad tidings to those on deck. No sooner had the sound of his voice died away than a baker's dozen was running up the ratlines, eager to obtain even a distant view of the great island.

A number of us old salts, who had sailed for Australia before, contented ourselves by snuffing the air like so many porpoises.

After we had passed between Tasmania and the South Sea continent we caught a light breeze on our quarter and headed for Sydney. No sooner had we dropped our right bower in the river just off the town than our vessel was boarded by the surgeon of the port, who examined our papers, and, being satisfied that we were in good health, our ship was allowed to haul up nearer the city. The old man went ashore to make his report to the Consul, but when he returned his face wore a troubled look. He called Mr. Bolter and myself into the cabin, where, to our surprise and chagrin, he stated that the Consul informed him that when the cargo was discharged he should have to press the ship into service for the Government to carry a lot of convicts to Van Dieman's Land. The vessel that brought them was disabled, and could proceed no farther.

The skipper remonstrated against the seizure, but it was of no avail. The Consul said he was sorry, but it could not be avoided—our vessel being the only one in port that would answer the purpose, and the convicts must be got off without delay. This news found its way among the crew, and several of them ran away and took to the bush, not caring to risk themselves at sea with a lot of desperate men fresh from the prisons of England. The skipper quieted the fears of the rest by telling them that no danger could possibly arise, as the convicts would be heavily ironed and placed between decks with a guard over them.

On the following morning, between decks were prepared for the reception of our live freight. A strong double bulkhead was put up just forward of the cabin, and one just aft of the chain-lockers, and extra bars and padlocks were procured for the hatches.

When I surveyed the work of the Government carpenters my mind felt somewhat easier.

Everything being in readiness, our guests were marched down between files of soldiers. Each convict was handcuffed, and on the right ankle of every man an iron ring was fastened, to which were attached heavy chains. Six of them being fastened together, their movements were quite slow and retard-

ed. As they filed up the gang plank to the deck, I counted eighty-seven. Some were large, powerful men; others were weak and wore a sickly expression, but they all had a look of dogged determination; their closely cropped hair and striped trousers and jackets making them look all the more savage. When number eighty-seven reached the deck, they were drawn up in line and inspected by the superintendent and his assistants. Each convict was thoroughly searched in order to see if he had any weapons.

Nothing was found, however, but what was proper for them to have. So the inspector informed us that there would be no danger, and that we would soon be rid of them. The guard that was to accompany us had been selected with great care, each one having a musket, two revolvers and a cutlass. Several extra casks of water were got on board for fear we would not have enough to last during the run. As no signs of our runaways were to be had, the skipper was obliged to ship several men in order to fill his compliment. One of these fellows was a villainous-looking customer, and I asked the Captain why he shipped such a man.

He replied that it was the best he could do. Sailors were scarce, as nearly every one was off in the mines or stock-raising. I told Captain Billows that I did not relish having such a man on board the Marathon, but he laughed at my fears, and said the man had been discharged from a Liverpool ship some two months before, and, as he wished to return home, he thought he would ship on the Marathon.

The Consul verified the man's statement, which satisfied the skipper, so he had shipped him on the strength of this. I said nothing more to the old man, but determined to keep a weather eye on that man's movements. We were to put out to sea that night, if the wind was favorable. The eighty-seven men were placed between decks, to remain there until morning, when they would be taken out for an airing. The guard consisted of twenty-four men, half the number standing watch while the others turned in below.

It was 11 o'clock before the wind was in our favor, and nearly eight bells when we weighed anchor. I tell you I did not sleep much in my watch below; the shouts and curses of the convicts made a perfect Bedlam and would have aroused the seven sleepers. In vain the guard threatened them, but they answered derisively and dared the soldiers to shoot.

Mr. Bolter came to my berth when his watch was out, and said he expected to find me awake, for sleep was impossible with those wretches howling.

So I lighted my pipe and went on deck, preferring to remain above than on a level with the banished Englishmen. Before daybreak they were quiet enough, and no particular one could be sifted out for creating the disturbance, so the whole eighty-seven went scot free.

About 7 o'clock they were led up on deck for an airing and to pass inspection. After three hours they were sent below again. In the afternoon about 3 o'clock a gale sprung up, which required all hands to reef topsails. The yards were soon manned, and I went aloft myself, as is generally the custom when all hand are called.

While I was passing the weather carrying and taking the last turn, I heard Shaling (one of the foremost hands, who was knotting a reef-point next to me,) ask:

"Where is Barker? I don't see him on the yard."

I looked over the line of men, and sure enough he wasn't there. I tell you I wasn't long in getting on deck and stating my suspicions to the Captain. We at once rushed forward, followed by several of the guard, and just as we reached the forecastle who should make his appearance but Barker.

The old man yelled at him: "What are you doing down there? Speak up! What are you shirking below for when all hands were called for duty?"

"I was sick," growled the scoundrel, "and could not go along."

"You are lying, you villain! and you know it," said the skipper. "I'll be bound you are up to some deviltry. Mr.

Steeraway, just keep your eye on him till I come back."

"Aye, aye, sir!" I responded.

By this time all hands had come down from aloft.

The Captain soon returned and stated that he could find nothing out of the way, but I was convinced in my own mind that something was out of the way. So the old man gave me leave to go below and satisfy myself. I could find nothing, but at the same time was far from being satisfied. I asked why was Barker, of all others, down below? We told the crew of our suspicions, and ordered them to keep a lookout on Barker's movements.

As the night came on the guard was relieved and cautioned by the sergeant to be on the alert. It seemed kind of queer to me that the convicts remained so quiet, for beyond a low conversation their voices were scarcely audible, but I thought afterward that probably they intended to get a good night's rest, and preferred to keep still.

I lay awake some time after turning in; but my eyes finally grew heavy, and I was in the land of dreams away off in Boston. My mother came up to my room (I was still in my dreams) to tuck in the bed-clothes. I felt her gentle touch on the blankets; but why did she place her hand over my mouth? I opened my eyes to see the reason.

The glittering blade of a sheath-knife was held before them. I knew the reason then pretty quick, I assure you, for Barker held it.

"Now, Steeraway," says he, "you just keep quiet, and you won't be hurt. Open your mouth and you won't know what hurt you."

I knew that any movement on my part would be my death warrant.

"Will you keep quiet if I take my hand from your mouth?"

I nodded my head in the affirmative and his hand was removed.

"Now, Steeraway," says he, "I am going to put a little stopper in your mouth. I won't hurt you, for I know how to do these things."

He evidently did, for I was very soon bound hand and foot, a gag placed in my mouth and your humble servant was rendered as useless as a dead man. The convict then left me and disappeared. I had not been alone more than ten minutes when I heard a voice near the berth say, "All right."

In a moment more a light draft of air entered my stateroom, and it smelt strongly of pent-up air—a sort of convict odor, so to speak.

The bulkhead had been removed and the cabin was soon crowded with prisoners. Not a sound did they make, for their irons were off, and the thought flashed quickly upon me, our ship is in their hands, may the Lord have mercy on our crew.

Silently they went up the cabin stairs; then I heard a quick rushing sound, shouts, yells, curses, then a few shots in quick succession; several splashes near my cabin deadlight; more shouts and yells.

"Down with them! Now or never!"

"No Van Dieman's for us! Down with them!"

In vain I heard several voices pleading for mercy. Finally the shouts and yells ceased, then the quick, hurried tramp of feet overhead. Presently a step descends the stairs, the rope binding me was cut, the gag torn from my mouth, and a gruff voice said:

"Come, Steeraway, you are wanted on deck. Lively, now."

I came to the conclusion that it was useless to deliberate, and I obeyed the order at once. It was not necessary for me to ask what the matter was. I knew that well enough, at a glance.

Barker—that scoundrel Barker—was an escaped convict, and had shipped on board the Marathon for the purpose of aiding his friends, and, from the appearance of things, he had succeeded beyond his utmost expectations. As I emerged from the cabin, I was greeted with: "Here he is," by several of the striped jacket gentry. "Now, Steeraway, we want you to mind and do just as we tell you—or what Joe Gosshawk, the Captain tells you—and you won't be hurt; but if you don't why overboard you go. We know you can navigate; now which is it, sharks' dinner or obey orders?"

Of course I didn't want to ease the appetite of the jet-finned wolves that

were swimming around the ship. So I told them I would do all they wished; but I wanted to know what had become of the Captain and crew.

"You'd better swim after them and ask 'em what's done with 'em; all except that cussed first mate, Bolter, and we can't get no track of him, blast him," said Gosshawk, the recognized leader.

I uttered a silent prayer that Bolter might be safely stowed away somewhere out of their clutches.

"Well, Steeraway," says Gosshawk, "where are we?"

"About eighty miles from Van Dieman's Land."

"Now, then," says he, "you just fix this ship so she will be more nor that in twelve hours from now. Make her run north until I ask you again were we are."

"And mind you don't play any points or you'll find the bottom of Davy Jones pretty quick."

I asked him then who would work the vessel.

"Why, you just give the orders and these men will work her; and mind you give them right."

"Then brace around the yards," replied I, "so I can get her on the other track."

"All right," said Gosshawk; tell us the ropes."

I explained to them and pointed out the braces.

In ten minutes we were around and sailing almost due north.

When day broke my heart almost sank within me. The deck presented a sickening sight. Pools of clotted blood here and there, torn clothing, the remnant of some desperate struggle, and the striped convict jackets and red coats of the English soldiers were scattered over the deck.

I requested that the decks be cleared up and washed down, so that no vestige might greet my eyes of that terrible encounter that had taken place the night before.

At noon Gosshawk asked me where we were. I had just taken the sun, and found we were in 32 deg. south latitude and 173 deg. longitude east, all of which I correctly informed the convict skipper.

"Ain't the Fijis about here somewhere?" he asked.

"Yes, they are in 20° latitude and 180° longitude."

"Well, take us there, Steeraway, and you are free to go in the long boat just as soon as we sight land. I'll take care of the Marathon myself."

As we still had about 750 miles to the northward to make, and about 420 miles of longitude, I computed the sailing distance, and found there were about 1,140 miles to cover, which, deducting the difference from our actual course, would leave about 930 miles before we raised the Fijis. I reported the same to Gosshawk, who grunted anything but satisfaction.

"No nearer than that? Well, keep for the Fijis anyhow."

So I kept her for the Fijis, and on the fourth day "Land, ho!" was shouted by one of the convicts who was stationed aloft. Gosshawk's eyes brightened up, and he turned to me, saying, "Well done, Steeraway."

If I only had my own way, I would have put them on a coral reef, but life is precious, you know, even to a sailor.—As the Marathon neared the land, which proved to be one of the group to the southward Gosshawk gave some orders in a low tone to several of the men. I knew what they were immediately, for the convicts began to cast off the lashings from the long boat. "So Gosshawk intends to keep his promise," I thought to myself, and I was to be cast adrift in the long-boat.

When within fifteen miles of land the breeze died away and the old Marathon lay almost motionless. Gosshawk swore and stamped the deck, but to no purpose. Kind Providence paid no attention to him. About dusk the wind made its appearance, and I got ready to stand in.

"Steeraway," said Gosshawk, "I guess you will have to make a voyage in the dark, but it can't be helped."

The boat was lowered; two kegs of water, a bag of hard-tack, and three or four junks of salt horse were tossed in, and I was told to follow suit. As I was

cast adrift, the villains shouted after me:

"Good-bye, Steeraway; you have done us a good turn, and we won't forget it!"

I made no reply, but sat in the stern of the boat gazing after the receding vessel. After looking at her for a few minutes I was overcome and bowed my head in my hands and wept. Just then a splash in the water near the boat aroused me. "A shark!" thought I.—Again I heard it, and then a low voice as if from the deep, "Steeraway!"

I sprang from my thwart as if struck by a galvanic shock. I strained my eyes and peered into the darkness. Presently I saw a dark form swimming toward the boat. Again the voice came over the water:

"Steeraway!"

Ben here knows I am not superstitious but I confess I did feel a little awe-stricken. Before I had time to collect my scattered thoughts, a hand was laid on the gun-wale, and the form of a man arose from the sea.

"It's Bolter, Joe; don't be frightened—I'm no ghost!"

That short sentence broke the spell which clung to me.

"Oh, Bolter!" cried I, in a transport of joy.

"For Heaven's sake, help me in the boat, Joe! I'm mighty weak. Now, where's the water? That outside the boat will do to swim in, but I can't drink it."

Soon I had the water-keg to his lips, and he took a long draught.

There! I never wanted water so bad but once before in my life; and this is what I call hard luck, Joe."

I agreed with him on that score, and asked him to tell me how he escaped from the convicts.

"Why, you see, Joe I got an inkling of what was coming, but before I could get out of the cabin the rascals were down upon us. So I slipped into the secret locker under the transom, and they looked into every place but that.— Luckily, the locker contained some canned meats and fruits, so there was no danger of my starving. I overheard that fellow's conversation—the one they called Gosshawk—and I knew, Steeraway, that you were safe. I also heard your boat lowered. I peeped from my hiding-place and I saw the cabin was clear, as they were all on deck to see you off. Soon as I heard the boat cast adrift I crawled through the stern window, hung by the frame for a minute or two, then dropped into the sea, swam after your boat and here I am."

Bolter suddenly started up and cried out:

"Look, Joe, if they have not set the ship on fire!"

And so they had. Before they landed they had no doubt left two or three of their number to lash the wheel and apply the torch. The flames threw a lurid light over the ocean, and soon the whole outline in fire of the doomed Marathon could be seen. Heavy tongues of flame ran up the tarred rigging, and rolls of fire, like a cloud, would now and then burst forth as the sails, one after another, were consumed. It was a magnificent sight, but a sorrowful one for us.— We watched her until scarcely a spark could be seen; when, suddenly, like a flash, the faint light disappeared, and all that once remained of the Marathon went to the bottom.

On the following morning we sighted an American whaler, which fortunately came near enough to see our signal of distress, and we were relieved from our uncomfortable position. Bolter and myself told the whaling skipper our story, when he at once made sail for Sydney, where the facts were laid before the English Consul, who took steps to capture the abort-haired villains. This was successfully accomplished.

A baker, whose loaves had been growing "small by degrees and beautifully less," when going his rounds serving customers, stopped at the door of one and knocked, when the lady within exclaimed: "Who's there?" and was answered, "The baker." "What do you want?" "To leave your bread." "Well, you needn't make such a fuss about it—put it through the keyhole," was the reply.