

(Continued.)

The punishment you gave me, though I own I deserved it, made me resolve to desert as soon as an opportunity offered. I had an old shipmate with me whom I could trust, and we planned the whole thing together. I knew if I deserted at Gibraltar or any of the ports in the Mediterranean I should almost certainly be caught, and shot off-hand as an example. I got Tom Brown to write my will, intending to leave my watch and chest to my messmate, who was to return them to me again at Gibraltar; but Tom played us a trick, and put his own name instead of my friend's in, and the trick was not found out until afterwards, when my friend was afraid of discovery, if he made any row about the matter.

"Who was your friend?" asked Captain R.

"He is alive, and in the service; I had rather not mention his name."

"Go on," said the Captain.

"That night I jumped overboard."

"How did you get back into the ship?" asked the Captain hastily.

"Why, sir, the forward port hole on the starboard side was left open, intentionally, with a bit of rope fastened to the gun, and hanging down, so that I could catch it."

The Captain struck his forehead with the palm of his hand, and said to himself, "What a set of blockheads we were!"

"Pretty well for that," responded honest Billy, "though not quite so great as might be expected." The last part of his speech he meant for a compliment, but it sounded directly the contrary.

"As soon as I was overboard," continued he, "I swam to the rope, waiting for the signal from my friend to climb up and hide myself in a coil of cable stored away close to the bows. In the bustle that followed it was easy enough to do this; and nobody saw me but my friend. Here I remained in wet clothes, rather uncomfortably, as you may suppose, until my provisions were expended, and my baccy-box empty. I calculated they would last till we arrived at Gibraltar, where nothing could have been easier for me than to slip out of the port-hole and swim ashore. But the play head winds and calms, which I dare say you remember, delayed the squadron several days longer than I expected, and exhausted my stock. I shouldn't have minded the want of biscuit and water, but it was impossible to live without the baccy. My friend had promised to come sometimes, with-in the hail of signals of distress, but, as he told me afterwards, he was confined for several days for picking a quarrel with Tom Brown, whom he loathed to pay off with a good hiding for forging the will."

"I remained in this state until I was nearly starved, when, not being able to stand it any longer, I, one night, when everybody between decks seemed fast asleep, crept out of my hole, where I lay coiled up in the shape of a cable, covered with a piece of old canvas, and, finding a pitcher of water, took a hearty drink. This was as far as I dared to go at that time, but the next time I ventured out again and was lucky enough to get a good supply of provisions, which happened to be left by some accident in the way. Two or three times I heard search making for me, and was terribly frightened, but I believe the searchers were more frightened still, and afraid to look closely into the cable tier. When we arrived at the Bay of Algiers, I took an opportunity of alarming Tom a little by visiting him in the night, and bidding him good-bye, after which I slipped quietly out of the port-hole, and my friend pulled up the rope and shut the port-hole after me."

"But how did you manage to escape from the police at Algiers?"

"I was on board the frigate at that time, in my old hiding place."

"And when the ship was searched directly after?"

"I was on shore at that time."

"And how did you manage at Malta?"

"The landlord was my sworn brother, and would not have blabbed for a thousand pounds."

"And the capers on the yard-arm and top-gallant, the visits to Tom Brown at Syracuse, and the wonderful stories told by the sailors?"

"I never paid but two visits to the ship, so far as I remember, sir, after she left Malta; one was the night I wanted to talk to Tom, the other when he disappeared the night afterwards. The rest of the stories were all owing to the jokes of some of the sailors and the fear of the others."

"But you are sure you did not jump into the sea with Tom Brown in a flame of fire?"

"No, sir, as I am an honest man, Tom got away without any help of mine, and without my ever knowing how until a long time afterwards, when I accidentally met him in Liverpool. When he deserted, and to quiet his conscience, left my watch and clothes to my friend, I had no motive for playing the ghost any more. I shipped in an American merchantman for Smyrna and after a voyage of a year or two, and saving a few hundred dollars, came to Boston at last. I did not dare to stay long ashore for fear of being known by some of the officers of the squadron; so I took my money and my bundle and went into the back country. I am a little of everything now, so I get on pretty well, and hope you won't have me shot by a court-martial."

"No," replied Captain R., "I am out of the navy now. I have turned farmer, too, and you are quite safe."

"I hope you prosper, sir."

"Not quite as well as you, Billy. I have come into the backwoods, to see if I can do better."

"Only stay with me, sir," said Billy, "and I will repay all your good offices."

"No, I am going on a little farther."

"You may go farther and fare worse, sir."

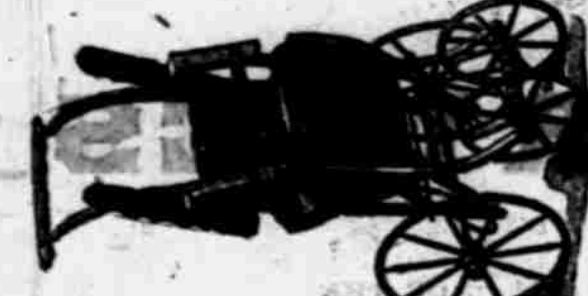
"Perhaps so; but I believe it is bed time, and so good night Mr. Ghost."

The next morning Captain R. proceeded on his way, reflecting on the singular story of Billy Morgan, whose pranks on board the frigate had convinced a great many men of the existence of ghosts, and thrown the gloom of superstitious horror over the remainder of their lives. "Not a sailor," thought he, "out of more than five hundred, with the exception of a single one, but will go to the grave in the full belief of Billy Morgan's supernatural appearance. What an unlucky adventure is this of mine! It has spoiled one of the best authenticated ghost stories of this or any preceding age."

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