

Arthur Timothy Shay

Hair Breadth Escapes



Timothy Arthur
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Arthur T. S.

Hair Breadth Escapes / Perilous incidents in the lives of sailors and travelers in Japan, Cuba, East Indies, etc., etc

Pirate Life

I served as assistant pilot on board the merchant vessel *Dolphin*, bound from Jamaica for London, which had already doubled the southern point of the Island of Cuba, favored by the wind, when one afternoon, I suddenly observed a very suspicious-looking schooner bearing down upon us from the coast. I climbed the mast, with my spy glass, and became convinced that it was a pirate. I directed the captain, who was taking his siesta, to be awaked instantly, showed him the craft, and advised him to alter our course, that we might avoid her. The captain, a man of unfortunate temper, whose principal traits of character were arrogance, avarice, and obstinacy, scorned my counsel, and insisted that we had nothing to fear, as we were perfectly well protected by the English flag.

We sailed on, while the schooner drew nearer, for about half a league, when we observed that the deck of the strange vessel swarmed with armed men, and her people were busy in getting out their boats. Upon seeing this, our captain was not a little frightened, and ordered a change in the course of the ship; but it was too late, for we were already within reach of the pirate, who soon hailed us, commanding our captain to come on board of his vessel, and as his commands were not obeyed, fired a broadside into us, which, however, did us no injury. At the same time a boat, containing nine men, pushed off towards us. They presented a most ferocious appearance, being armed with guns, swords, and long knives. They boarded our brig, as we offered not the least resistance.

They then commanded the captain, the ship's carpenter, and myself, to enter their boat, and sent us with an armed escort of four men, who handled us most roughly, to the schooner, where the pirate captain received us with deep curses. He was a gigantic, powerful, well-formed man, of a pale, sallow complexion, large prominent eyes, a hooked nose, and a huge mouth, and glossy hair and beard. He might be about thirty years old, and spoke broken English with a Spanish accent.

"Have you specie on board?" he asked.

"None at all," answered our Captain, thoughtlessly enough, for we had only too much of it, and unfortunately the papers referring to it lay upon the cabin table.

"The devil," cried the robber, "do you take me for a child? All home-bound vessels have money on board; give up yours quietly, and depart in the devil's name whither you will."

The captain repeated his silly denial, and enraged the pirate still further.

"Well," he said with frightful calmness, "if you will not give up the money, I will throw your cargo overboard, and search for it myself. If I find it, I'll lock you in your cabin, and burn your vessel with every man on board."

After this threat he walked up and down the deck, and said more quietly, turning to me:

"You must remain with us, for there is no one among my men who thoroughly understands a helmsman's duty, and I must give myself more rest, I am not well."

One can imagine my sensations. In the meanwhile supper had been prepared, and the pirate officers, six or seven in number, invited us politely to partake of it; we accepted, as we did not wish to displease them. The meal consisted of onion soup with bread, tolerable fish, and a very good ham, with plenty of excellent Cogniac and Bordeaux wine. During supper the schooner approached the

Dolphin, and lay alongside. It was now perfectly dark, and they showed us a place close by the cabin door, where we could sleep.

The following morning we were invited to breakfast, which consisted of coffee with goat's milk, broiled fish, smoked pork, very good biscuit, and sweet brandy. After breakfast we were sent back to the Dolphin, which, as the captain still persisted in his obstinate assertion that there was no money on board, was being emptied of her contents by the robber captain's commands. First of all I slipped into the cabin to look after my chest; it had been broken open and robbed of all articles of value, among which were two diamond rings. Some suits of clothes, and some shirts, were all that remained. In unloading the vessel they began first with the cow; then they threw over the poultry, and all the other provisions, and then the wine and brandy casks. They next came to the actual cargo of the brig, out of which only what was very valuable was preserved, for there was no room to stow any thing away in the pirate ship. Thus they worked until towards evening, when we were again invited to supper, and again shown to our sleeping place. The sailors had already become intoxicated, and were singing and rioting upon deck, without either officers or captain daring to check them, for on board such ships discipline is not to be thought of.

The next day, right after breakfast, the pirate called the captain to the after deck.

"I speak now," said he, "in kindness to you, for the last time; give up your money, or tell where it is concealed. Do it, or, God d-n me, the Dolphin, yourself, and all on board are lost."

The captain answered as before, that there was no money on board.

"Well then," cried the captain in a rage, "you shall find out who you have to deal with. Ho there!" he cried to his men, "down with him into the hold, tie up the pumps, and bring fire!"

The command was instantly obeyed, and a quantity of dry wood was heaped up around the unfortunate man, which they were just about to kindle, when his agony wrung from him the confession that under a board in the cabin floor there was a box containing about five hundred doubloons. He was unbound, and the gold was found.

"Well," said the pirate, "that is something. But you have more—I know it! Give it up, or by all the devils, you shall be burnt."

The captain now swore, with tears, that he had not a penny more, but the pirate would not believe him.

"I will refresh your memory," said he, "rely upon it. Bind up the pumps again, and kindle the fire quickly!"

The poor man was again bound fast, and the light wood around him was kindled; the flames licked his clothes and hands, and his eye-brows and hair were already singed, but he renewed his protestations and commended himself to God's mercy. The pirate at last believing his assertion, let the pumps play and extinguished the fire.

"Well," he said in a milder tone, "I will set you at liberty, and you may sail whither you please, except to any Cuban port, for if I find you again in these waters I will scuttle your vessel and leave you to your fate."

He supplied the Dolphin with water and provisions for ten days and loosened it from the schooner. I was obliged to remain upon the pirate ship while the brig set sail, and had soon vanished from our sight. As a thick mist arose we anchored on the edge of a sand-bank, and remained there over night; at break of day we again set sail and ran into a small, concealed, but very safe harbor on the coast of Cuba.

II

We had scarcely cast anchor when a whole fleet of large and small boats pushed off from the shore and sailed towards us. The pirate knew with whom he had to deal, and made ready for them. Two officials and several other gentlemen and ladies now stepped on board, and were saluted with fifteen

guns. After the guests had congratulated the robber upon his successful expedition, refreshments were brought, and the whole company commenced dancing on the deck, where some black musicians were playing. The merriment lasted far into the night, and all left the vessel, delighted with the rich presents of silks and jewels that they had received, while they promised to send purchasers to the sale of the pirate's booty, which was to take place on the following day. As soon as we were alone again, the pirate captain informed me confidentially, that he maintained the friendliest relations with the government, and that he had no dread whatever of any hostile attempts against him.

"I can easily settle all that with these people," said he, "with presents."

On the following morning the deck was swept and preparations were made for the sale, and a crowd of ladies and gentlemen soon appeared; the captain and I received them on board, and conducted them under the blue canopy with silver fringe that had been erected for their accommodation. At a signal from the ship's bell the sale began. As many articles were sold by weight, I presided over the scales, that were placed near the mainmast. The purchasers stood around me in a semi-circle, and as every one of them bought either a whole or half a hundred weight, it was immediately shoveled into the bags and baskets they had brought. Some attendants, in the meanwhile, handed round wine, cakes, and biscuit, and the wine had its effect; the sale was very lively, and before three o'clock in the afternoon, our casks and barrels were almost empty.

The captain now invited the whole company to dinner, and the further sale of silks, linens, and ornaments, was postponed until afterwards. He then called me aside, and gave me a peculiar commission; he ordered me to concoct a drink which should be no less intoxicating than pleasant.

"After the guests shall have partaken of it," said he, "they will bid high enough, and I shall have an excellent sale. Call it English punch and they will like it all the better."

I had to promise him to do my best, and go to work at once; as we had a good store of all kinds of intoxicating liquors on board, I could choose what I pleased. I mixed together, Bordeaux, Madeira, Rum, Arrac, Geneva, Cogniac, and Porter; dissolved in it half a hat-full of sugar and threw in about two dozen oranges, and as many sweet lemons. It certainly tasted most excellently, and even the smell of it affected my head. After dinner, when the dessert was about to be placed upon the table, I called six sailors, and providing each with a large bowl of my mixture, they marched into the cabin in procession and placed them on the table; then I informed the company that the mixture was a new kind of English punch, and filled their glasses for them.

The delicious drink was very popular and even the ladies sipped it with delight. The effect was immediate; after the first two glasses, all grew very loquacious; two more glasses and the gentlemen were thoroughly intoxicated without being stupified. At this moment the sale began, and all rushed on deck, and proceeded to purchase in such a wild, excited manner, that the worst article that we had, sold for twice its real value. When the business was nearly concluded, a frightful noise arose on the forward deck; the crew had received a double allowance of rum and brandy, and very naturally, a quarrel had arisen between two of the most excited, in which one of them was stabbed in the breast. As I understood something of surgery, I was called upon to dress and bandage the wound, and whilst I was thus engaged the company departed in the boats, the gentlemen in a high state of excitement and much pleased with their bargains.

When all was quiet on board, the captain called to him the man who had escaped from the combat unhurt, and inquired into the cause of the bloody fray. And now a fearful secret came to light. The man revealed a conspiracy against the captain, headed by one of the officers, which had been in progress for a month. The officer who commanded it had asked leave of absence, and was at that time on land, engaged in perfecting his plan, which was, to fall upon the captain and murder him with the greater part of the crew. The wounded sailor had belonged to this conspiracy, which was frightful enough, and so angered the captain that he was almost beside himself with rage. He forthwith called together the whole ship's company and made known to them the plot he had discovered. He had scarcely finished speaking when fierce cries for revenge arose among the crew; they rushed below,

and in a few minutes dragged up the wounded sailor, hacked off his arms and legs, plunged their knives into his body, and threw it overboard. They then dragged out his chest; destroyed and tore to rags every thing in it, and in a perfect frenzy of rage, threw it into the sea also. Then the watch was trebled and set; all sharpened their daggers and knives, and prepared for an attack. But the night passed and nothing occurred.

On the following afternoon, a sail appeared, which steered towards us; the captain took the spy glass, and instantly recognized the boat which had carried the treacherous officer and part of the crew on land the day before.

“Here come the conspirators,” he cried, with a fearful curse, “we’ll give them the welcome they deserve. Thirty of you load your muskets and be ready.”

When the boat was within a short distance of us, it stopped and hoisted a white flag in token of peace; the captain did the same, and the boat then approached perfectly unsuspectingly. When they were within musket shot, the captain ordered his men to fire. Five men fell dead, a sixth sprang into the sea, and the rest turned and rowed away. The captain sent a boat out after the unhappy wretch who was in the water, and in less than five minutes they dragged him on board. He was wounded in the arm and was bleeding freely. But, notwithstanding, his clothes were, by the captain’s orders, torn off, and he was exposed naked to the burning rays of the sun. When he had suffered thus for an hour, the tyrant went to him and asked with suppressed rage:

“Now traitor, will you confess?”

“I am innocent,” replied the half-dead wretch, “I know of nothing.”

“Here,” cried the captain to his savages, “take him and row him into the inlet; there leave him in the swamp; we’ll see whether the gad-flies will not help his memory. You,” continued the captain, “go with them, and give heed to this example.”

Five of the pirates, armed with pistols and swords, bound the wretched man, hand and foot, threw him into the boat and rowed into the inlet. Just at the mouth of it there was a morass filled with gad-flies and other poisonous insects. Into this dreadful ditch they threw their former comrade, and then withdrew to a short distance to jeer at and mock him. In about an hour they drew him out again; he was still living, but his body was so covered with blisters that he looked like nothing human. In this condition he was taken to the ship again.

“Has he confessed?” shouted the captain to us as we were approaching.

We replied in the negative.

“Then shoot him down like a dog.”

Two of the robbers seized him, one presented a pistol to his forehead, another to his breast; they were both discharged at the same moment, and the unhappy man was bathed in his own blood. As he gave no further sign of life, they hurled him overboard.

What a deed of horror! I passed a fearful night, for I could not close my eyes when I thought of the probable fate that awaited me among these miscreants.

III

The next morning I went sadly enough to my labor, which consisted in cutting and making a new sail, when at about ten o’clock, the watch at the mast-head, cried out:

“A sail! a sail!”

I went aloft, and saw that it was a large merchant vessel. The captain weighed anchor, sailed down upon her and when he supposed himself sure of his prey, fired off a cannon; the brig hoisted the English flag and lay to. This unexpected manœuvre seemed very suspicious to the captain; he began to believe that he had to deal with a man-of-war; changed his plan, and determined upon boarding the strange vessel; he gave orders to have two boats manned with the bravest of his crew, which should

attack the ship upon both sides at once, and commanded me to head the expedition. Such an order terrified me not a little.

“What,” I cried, “must I fight thus shamefully with my countrymen. If I am taken prisoner what can I expect but the most shameful death. No, Senor, I can never obey your orders.”

“Who are you,” he answered fiercely, “who think yourself so much better than me and my men? Do we not expose ourselves to death every hour of the day? My vessel shall never be taken, for when I can no longer defend it I will blow it up. Obey me instantly or I will have you shot in the twinkling of an eye.”

“Do it,” I coolly rejoined, “I do not fear death, but I will never obey your orders.”

“Well then,” he cried furiously, “to death with him. Bandage his eyes. Five minutes respite only, and let three men aim at his head and three at his heart.”

The pirates obeyed instantly, and I commended my soul to God. When the five minutes had gone, the captain asked:

“Are you ready, helmsman?”

“Yes, Senor.”

“You persist then in your obstinacy.”

“Yes, Senor.”

“Attention! Make ready! Fire!”

The men fired, but I remained unhurt; a burning cork flew in my face, but made no wound. The captain had intended to frighten me, and his men had only loaded with blank cartridges.

“Well, helmsman,” he cried, “are you mortally wounded? Have you had enough?”

“I am not wounded, Senor,” I replied, “but I am not a boy to be trifled with; if you are going to kill me, do it quickly, for I will never disgrace myself by obeying your orders.”

“So be it then,” cried the pirate, foaming with rage; “bind him to the mainmast; unbandage his eyes; let us have plenty of tinder; lay a train of powder, and to the devil with him!”

His orders were obeyed; I closed my eyes and awaited death for the second time. In about ten seconds I heard a terrible explosion, which stunned me for some minutes. When I recovered my consciousness, I felt a terrible pain in my lower limbs; my hands were bound, and my clothes on fire.

“Shoot me upon the spot; why do you torture me so?”

But the captain and his men only laughed; and when my stockings were entirely burnt, he gave orders to pour water over me and unbind me, saying composedly, as if nothing had happened:

“You provoked me or I should not have done it; now go below and get cured.”

But the moment I was unbound, I fainted away, and when I came to myself I lay upon a mattress in the cabin, and felt the most intolerable pain in all my limbs, but particularly in my legs. On a chair beside me sat the cook; he told me that lemonade had been prepared for me; I took some of it, and asked him to support me, that I might look at my legs; they were frightfully burnt; in some places the bone was exposed. While I was examining them, the captain appeared, looked at my horrible wounds, and said, with a show of compassion:

“Helmsman, ask for whatsoever you want, and you, cook, see that he has it. Make haste and get better; by heaven, I hope you’ll get over it.”

With these words he left me. I called for a better bed, the medicine chest, lint, and bandages; every thing was instantly brought, and I did my best to soothe my sufferings. I inquired of my officious attendants where we were, and learnt, to my surprise, that we were again at anchor in the harbour. The captain had decided that the brig was an English man-of-war, and had made a hasty retreat to a place of safety.

After dinner, the cook made his appearance again, and as he had nothing else to do, remained with me. He informed me that the captain, a naturally quick-tempered, tyrannical man, was a perfect tiger when he was in a passion, that he had already shot and stabbed twenty of his men with his own hands, and begged me to be upon my guard, for I had not a man, but a monster, to deal with.

“Whatever you want,” he added, compassionately, “let me know, and be assured that I mean you well.”

With this comforting assurance he departed, while I prepared a cooling salve and bandaged my wounds neatly. I drank quantities of lemonade and broth, and felt that as the afternoon wore on, the heat in my limbs was subsiding. Towards sunset, the kind cook again appeared, to see how I was, and to inform me that the captain was raging like a maniac on deck, for a coasting vessel had brought him news that my former captain had sailed straight for Havana, and had there made all sorts of complaints with regard to the robbery that he had sustained. While he was speaking the captain himself rushed into the cabin.

“See,” he cried, “what rogues your countrymen are. Spite of my commands, that traitor sailed directly for Havana and entered a complaint against me. But I know how to deal with him; I have sent four bold fellows after him; he is a dead man if he lingers two days longer, and to make all sure, I shall send a fifth this evening, who understands his business well, and will despatch him without mercy.”

With these words he left the cabin. “What a monster, what cruelty!” I thought, but borne down by fatigue, I soon fell asleep.

I had been sleeping about two hours when I was roused by the captain.

“You must come on deck,” he said, rather anxiously, “we are in trouble.”

Four sailors seized me, and immediately carried me above, sick as I was. Here I learned that a boat was approaching in the darkness, and that preparations for defence were being made.

“Hail it in English,” said the captain.

I did so, but received no answer.

“Now let me try,” he continued; “we’ll see if they understand Spanish.”

They answered immediately as friends, and announced that they came with important news for the captain. The partisans of the officer, who had formed the before-mentioned conspiracy, maddened by the death of their comrades, had sworn to be revenged. They had tracked the fifth assassin, who had been sent off this evening to the house of one of the government officials, who was in friendly connection with the pirate captain, and our informants assured us that if timely aid were not rendered him, he would certainly be put to death. This information had a most distressing effect upon the crew, and no one offered to go upon such a dangerous errand. But the captain did not lose courage, gave the men quantities of rum and brandy, and promised four pieces of gold to each volunteer. Ten of the boldest then came forward, got ready immediately, and were fully provided with weapons, as well as biscuit and wine. Before the end of a quarter of an hour, they rowed ashore in company with the other boat. The captain commanded the whole crew to remain on deck, and doubled the watch. Every thing was quiet, and prepared for any emergency. I was carried down into the cabin again, but could not close my eyes; the door was open, and I heard every thing that passed on deck. About midnight our boat returned, but only with five men, who gave the following account of their adventures to the captain.

After they had landed, and proceeded a few steps, they came upon a servant of that *honest* official to whose house the fifth assassin had been tracked, and who was to have furnished him with a pass. This man informed them that the assassin had actually fallen into the hands of the conspirators, and that he was lost if they did not instantly hasten to his rescue. They made a circuit to avoid their enemies, and succeeded in surprising a few stragglers, from whom they extorted the information that a considerable number of the conspirators were making merry in the house of the officer, where they had taken their comrade prisoner. They immediately proceeded to this house, where they commenced a most destructive fire through the doors and windows, not taking any aim or making any discrimination between friend or foe. They then entered, killed the wounded, and took some prisoners. Unfortunately the *good old host* had received two serious shots, and now sent to the captain to request him to send to his relief the Englishman in whom he placed such confidence.

With regard to the assassin, he had been found bound hand and foot, but uninjured, and having been provided with a passport, had proceeded to Havana.

“Helmsman,” cried the captain, now entering the cabin, “it can’t be helped. You must go on shore, and look after the old gentleman’s wounds, for he is my best friend, and I cannot treat him with too much consideration. Put a mattress into the boat,” he continued, “that he may lie comfortably upon it, and when you get to land carry him as carefully as possible.”

They let me down into the boat in an arm-chair, laid me upon a mattress, put a cushion under my head, and covered me with a silken coverlet. The moon was just rising, and it was about one o’clock. The current was against us, and we were almost an hour in reaching the shore. After we had taken something to eat and drink in a little ale-house, not ten steps from the beach, I was placed on a bamboo litter, furnished with an abundance of soft cushions, and put upon a horse. We journeyed for about an hour through a high mahogany forest, until we arrived comfortably at a small town, and before the door of the mansion of Don Toribios, as the conscientious official was called. I immediately examined the old man’s wounds, which proved to be not at all dangerous, extracted the balls without difficulty, and left him to the care of his wife and daughter. We returned slowly to our boat, and reached the schooner before sunrise.

The sailors rendered an account of their expedition, and each received as a reward a double allowance of brandy, and they were told that the prisoners they had taken had been tortured and then shot. The captain asked me particularly concerning Don Toribios, and as I was able to give him favorable replies, he was greatly rejoiced, and loaded me with praises.

“You must go on shore to him every morning or afternoon,” said he, “for this man is my best friend. But now go and rest, you seem very weary; you shall be called when the breakfast is ready.” I was indeed rejoiced to be able to rest. I bandaged my wounds afresh, stretched myself on my couch, and fell asleep immediately.

V

After dinner, I was about to go on shore, in accordance with the captain’s orders, when, just as they were letting me down into the boat, a large vessel appeared in sight. I was immediately assisted to the mast-head, and commanded to report what vessel it was. I examined it for a quarter of an hour through my spy-glass, and was at last convinced that it was a large Dutch merchantman. The captain then had me brought down, and communicated my discovery to the crew, who received it with a loud “huzza.”

“These Dutchmen,” said he, “are rich prizes; they are sure to have cash on board.”

Instantly we weighed anchor, and the chase began. But the Dutchman was suspicious, and tried every means of avoiding us; it was too late, however, for we sailed twice as fast as he, and besides had the advantage of the wind. To deceive him, we hoisted the English flag, and fired a shot. He then turned towards us. Our captain supposed that he would offer resistance, and accordingly, when he came within shot, sent a ball into him from our forty-four pounder, which struck the water by the side of the vessel, and then hoisted the blood-red pirate flag.

“Send the captain, with his papers, on board,” he shouted through the speaking trumpet. As the fulfilment of this command seemed tardy to the pirates, they enforced it by discharging a dozen muskets. This produced the desired effect; the captain and supercargo immediately came on board; they were both pale as death, and trembled with fear. The pirate snatched their papers from them, and threw them to me saying, “There! translate those things for me.” Although I understood very little Dutch, I managed to make out that the vessel was bound from Antwerp for some Mexican port, and that it was freighted with wine, cheese, hams, cloths and linens. The pirate was not a little rejoiced to hear this, and ordered me to ask the amount of cash on board. The Dutchman assured us that he had none.

“We will soon see for ourselves!” said the captain, and taking with him the pilot and four sailors, he went on board of the merchantman. In half an hour he called out to the schooner to come alongside. This was done, and the Dutchman was again sent on board of his vessel, where he was greeted with a blow from the flat of a sword that stretched him on the deck. The inquiries concerning the money now began afresh, accompanied by the threats of burning both ship and crew, if money should actually be found on board. Then the Dutchman was placed in confinement, while the crew were sent on board the schooner, and down into the hold. Both ships sailed into the harbour at sundown, that they might spend the night in safety. I received permission to retire to the cabin, and there found a neat little supper that the care of the benevolent cook had provided for me. The salve that I had prepared for my wounds had an excellent effect, and I was now quite free from pain.

The next morning the freight of the captured vessel was transferred to the schooner, and I was again obliged to assist with my small knowledge of Dutch. After dinner I was sent on shore again, to dress Don Toribios’ wounds. As they were healing rapidly, and the fever had quite left him, I soon returned, his daughter having presented me with a box of Havana cigars.

As night had not yet set in, they proceeded vigorously in transferring the cargo of the Dutchman, and the goods were piled up high on the deck of the schooner; they were not to be sold, as before, but taken by a coasting vessel to Havana, and disposed of there. The next morning the coaster appeared, and the transfer of the cargo began again. While all were thus busied, the captain drew me aside, and said to me in an unusually confidential tone, “I must accompany this coaster some distance; we shall be gone four or five days. Therefore, go on shore once more, and carry to Don Toribios as much physic as he will want during this time, but be sure to be back before sunset.”

I immediately obeyed, fulfilled my commission, and returned at the appointed hour; the captain was making merry with the coaster, and as I would take no part in their excesses, I retired to rest, but could not sleep. The door of my cabin opened gently, to admit the cook; he sat down by me, and said as softly as possible:

“While you were on shore to-day, the captain called together the crew, and told them that during the course of four weeks they had all learned to know the captive Englishman, and must be aware that he was most useful in every capacity. ‘But,’ said the captain, ‘he is not to be trusted; I see that he meditates escape, day and night, and if his plans should succeed, which is not impossible, the first English man-of-war that he meets will have the secret of our retreat here, and all will be over with us. I have, therefore, formed a resolution that will certainly seem right to you all. We will let him finish the sails that he is now at work upon, and then get rid of him. Some evening I will get up a dispute with him; you will gather around us and take sides, and in the heat of argument I will plunge my knife into his bosom, and you will finish the business.’ The crew consulted together, and opinion was divided; only a few of the most bloody-minded agreed to the thought of your murder; at last it was determined to have you closely watched, and not to allow you to go on shore any more.”

“Have it so then,” cried the captain, angrily; “you will see what will come of it.”

“Now my friend,” concluded the brave fellow, “now you know every thing. I fear the captain has not given up his intention; therefore, take your measures accordingly. If I can assist you in carrying out any plan that you may form, rely upon my desire to serve you. God grant, that if you escape, I may accompany you.”

With these words he bade me good night and left me. What were my sensations. “Am I then,” I said to myself “to be thus cut off in the midst of my youth? No! I will balk these monsters. I must attempt to save myself even if the attempt cost me my life.” These thoughts occupied me during the night, and I did not sleep until towards four o’clock in the morning.

VI

At sunrise the schooner weighed anchor, in order to accompany the coaster. Towards noon we discovered an English brig, which proved to be a merchantman, and the customary pursuit and capture ensued. The cargo consisted of rum, for the vessel was bound for Liverpool from Jamaica. The English captain, who was an old acquaintance of mine, offered to ransom his vessel, and begged me to make the arrangement for him; this I gladly did, and the brig was ransomed for four hundred doubloons and eight casks of rum. The Englishman, who had a considerable amount of cash on board, pressed upon me, at parting, twenty doubloons.

Towards evening the skies were covered with black clouds; the sea began to rage, and every thing indicated an approaching storm. We therefore ran into a little bay, sheltered by high rocks, and passed a very quiet night, although a fearful storm was raging on the open sea, and the rain fell in torrents. The next morning we set sail again and conveyed the coaster almost to the place of her destination. On our return voyage we captured a French vessel, but it was also ransomed, and on the evening of the fourth day we reached again our old station, where the Dutch brig had been left under the command of the pilot. The Dutch captain and a great part of his crew had accompanied us.

The pirate was very well pleased with his short, profitable trip, and gave orders to the steward to prepare a magnificent collation, to which he invited his officers, the Dutch captain, and myself. As it was too warm in the cabin the table was laid on deck; the steward had done his best, and when the wine had begun to take effect, the Dutchman informed me that he had a proposition to make. He spoke in Dutch, and that no suspicion might be excited, I immediately informed the captain of what he had said, and offered to carry on the negotiation. This was agreed to, and the Dutchman then informed me that he had concealed upon his person, a heavy gold chain, a gold watch set with brilliants, and two diamond rings, and that he would give them all if the pirate would release his vessel and allow him to depart, with provisions for eight days. I translated all this to the captain as well as I could, and his countenance immediately beamed with the friendliest expression.

“Tell the captain,” he replied mildly, “that I accept his offer, and if he will hand over to me the articles in question, I swear by the holy virgin, that he shall depart to-morrow morning early, with eight days’ provisions, and sail whither he pleases.”

I interpreted this to the captain, who hastened, joyfully, into the cabin, and returned in a few minutes with the jewels, which he laid before the captain, on the table.

“Done,” said he, reaching his hand and filling his glass; “join me captain and gentlemen all. By heaven, I will keep my word; you are all witnesses.”

We remained at table until eleven o’clock, when all retired; my thoughts kept me awake during the whole night. Immediately after sunrise, the Dutch vessel was supplied with the promised provisions, besides six casks of water and two of Geneva. The captain took leave of us all; put several pieces of gold into my hand, and betook himself on board of his own ship. In half an hour he set sail, and with a favourable wind was soon out of sight.

Towards eight o’clock, a boat appeared from the shore, and brought two calves and two sheep, just killed, and a quantity of fowls, vegetables, and fruit, as a present for the captain, from Don Toribios and the other officials. They announced their intention, also, of paying us a visit with their wives, in the afternoon, whereat the captain was much pleased. Preparations were instantly made for their reception, and the steward was busy enough; at half-past two the little fleet appeared, and the guests arrived on board, where they were served with refreshments. They talked, laughed, joked, played the guitar, and sang, until near sunset, when the air grew cooler. Then the seats and benches were cleared away; the old people betook themselves, with their wine, to the cabin, and the young ones danced until they were called to supper. The time was passed most pleasantly, and I almost forgot that I was on board a pirate vessel. Don Toribios, too, was very friendly, and called out as soon

as he saw me, "Going on excellently! all healed over!" I examined his wounds and found it actually so. The old gentleman then applied himself industriously to the wine, and appeared determined to make up for the abstinence of two weeks. My warning, to be prudent, was not regarded in the least.

The company found the entertainment so much to their liking that they remained three hours longer on board than they had at first intended; the moon was in her first quarter, but shone brighter than even the full moon in England. A little after nine, the guests took leave of the captain and entered their boats; the little fleet rowed away in the glorious moonlight, and every thing was restored to order on board of the schooner.

The captain was unusually gay and friendly; had three bottles of Bordeaux brought, and called to me: "Sit down; we will drink another glass together. Fill for yourself. I see you are a brave, fine fellow, and if you conduct yourself well, you shall have such wages as you'll get on no ship of the line, I can tell you. Come, drink; here's to our noble profession!"

I was obliged to join him, and drank in this way almost a bottle full. I succeeded, however, in allaying all his suspicion of me. Towards midnight I threw myself upon my bed, but could not close my eyes, my thoughts were so busy with plans of escape. Where shall I be, I asked myself, in one—two weeks—in a month? If my plan succeeds, I shall be upon my way home; but if not, where then? Of this last alternative I would not think, and towards two o'clock I fell asleep.

VII

The next afternoon I sat working at my sails, when a boat with three negroes in it, pushed off from the shore, and approached the schooner. The man at the helm had a large basket, covered with black, before him, and the usually white aprons of the negroes were black. This indicated a death, and I was very anxious to know which of yesterday's company had so quickly had their joy turned to mourning; in the meanwhile the boat arrived, and the chief negro came on board.

"Master dead!" he said, in his broken Spanish. "Don Toribios dead! last night! Here a letter and presents for Senor captain and Senor helmsman."

With these words he handed the captain four bundles of Havana cigars, as many baskets of fruit, and two great pastries, besides four jars of sweet-meats. This giving of presents is customary in Cuba in case of any death, and I also received the due proportion of gifts. The negro was dismissed with a present in money.

When the captain, after dinner, had taken his siesta, he made known to the crew the death of Don Toribios, and ordered preparations to be made for paying the last honors to his deceased friend. A hundred bottles of wine, torches, crape, and whatever else is necessary upon such occasions, were put into the long-boat, into which the captain entered, with ten sailors, six musicians, and myself. We found horses and mules waiting for us on the shore, and we soon reached the house of death, before which a great many tar barrels were burning, and in the centre stood a bier, upon which the coffin was placed. A number of mourners, among whom were twelve or fifteen ladies, now greeted us. We returned their salutations and entered the brilliantly lighted saloon, hung with black, where sat the mother and daughter of the dead man, dressed in the deepest mourning. We expressed our sympathy for them; refreshments were handed round, and all were provided with torches. The procession was then arranged. Our sailors carried the coffin; the musicians commenced a mournful march; the priest, with the choristers, led the way and the others followed in pairs; the captain conducted the mother, and I the daughter. Our sailors sent up some rockets, and at this signal the schooner fired minute guns for a half hour. After the conclusion of the solemnity, we went to the funeral supper, and the guests indulged in all kinds of gayety.

Midnight had past, when we broke up; towards two o'clock we got on board the schooner and retired to rest. The next morning I returned to my sails, but thought incessantly of my plan for escape, and how it could be most prudently carried into execution, for the danger of such an attempt

was immense. I believed that I could possess myself of one of the boats, but where could I find a companion to be depended upon? Yet such a one was absolutely necessary. I could never row alone for five or six leagues, which was the shortest distance that would place me out of reach of the pirates. Whether I should confide in the steward, I could not exactly decide. Imagine my astonishment when the honest fellow came to me while the captain was taking his afternoon's nap in the cabin, and began gently to whisper in my ear.

"My friend, we must fly. In a few days there will be horrible work on board here; a new conspiracy has been formed against the captain, and his death is inevitable. We must seize the first opportunity to get away. I know these waters well, for I was born upon the Cuban coast. You know that quantities of fishing boats come every evening to exchange their fish for brandy, and their owners often remain all night on board, while their boats are floating by the side of the vessel. My plan is to get into one of these about midnight, and trust ourselves to the wind and the current, until the next morning, when we can find our way to Havana."

"Well, my honest friend," I replied, "I agree with you entirely; in this way we cannot fail to succeed. We will, therefore, hold ourselves in readiness any day, and God will not forsake us in our hour of need."

Thus we separated.

When the captain awoke he complained of violent pain in his limbs, and I saw clearly that a fever had attacked him. With his consent, I opened a vein and took from him thirteen ounces of blood. His bed was placed on the forward deck, and an awning spread above it, for the cabin was too close and hot. I left him for the night and prescribed almond milk and orange flower water.

VIII

It was about sunset, the weather was sultry, and towards the south masses of clouds were forming, which betokened a storm. The sea, too, began to be disturbed. Two fishing boats, that had ventured too far into the open sea, came alongside and asked to be allowed to lodge on board for the night. The lieutenant granted their request, after conferring with the captain, and told them to make fast their boats to the stern of the vessel. They did so, and came on board, bringing with them a large basket of the fish that they had caught.

After they had presented the captain and lieutenant with the two finest fish in their basket, they exchanged the rest for rum and brandy.

They took two of the dozen great bottles they received to treat the crew with. The captain, who had no appetite, gave up his fish to the crew, and the lieutenant invited his comrades and me to share his with him.

When the steward came to receive the fish, I said to him, with peculiar emphasis: "Well, steward! now or never! display your art!"

He understood me perfectly.

"Yes, indeed, Senor," he replied, significantly, "I will make an English sauce for the gentlemen, such as they cannot find in all Havana."

He went out, and I went to inquire after the captain.

"I feel much better," he replied to my inquiries; "only give me something strengthening."

I retired to the cabin, wrote down what I wanted upon a card, and sent it to the steward. I soon received two dozen oranges and sweet lemons, a great bottle of Canary, half a loaf of bread, a pound of sugar, three spoons full of East India cinnamon, and a bottle of old Malaga wine. From these I prepared most artistically, a strong, delicious drink. I mixed with it, finally, one hundred and fifty drops of opium that I took from the medicine chest. The dose was rather large, but I had to do, not with men, but with beasts. After I had poured it all into a large bowl, I carried it to the captain, who

immediately took ten or twelve spoons full of it, and was quite delighted; I told him that he might drink as much of it as he pleased.

“Well,” he said, kindly, “since you are so skilful, go and get two dozen bottles of Bordeaux; you can share them with the officers.”

I thanked him and turned to go.

“Stop!” he cried, “if I am well my men shall feel well too; they have been grumbling for several days; I’ll moisten their throats with rum; we’re perfectly safe here; tell the steward to roll a barrel on deck; they shall drink until they can’t stand.”

The storm had, in the meantime, blown over; the sea was placid, and the full moon was rising gloriously. The table was already spread; I hastened to the cabin, taking with me the laudanum bottle from the medicine chest, out of which I poured a stupefying dose into the rum-cask and into every bottle of Bordeaux, except the one destined for my own use, which I marked by a cut in the cork. Then I gave the captain’s orders to the steward, who immediately obeyed them, and the crew expressed their gratitude by three cheers and a “Long live the captain!”

I now placed the bottles of Bordeaux upon the table so that the one I had marked stood by my plate. Eight o’clock struck during these preparations; supper was brought and we immediately took our places. The crew lay about on the deck, and seemed very good humored. When the keenness of their appetite was appeased, they began to drink, and the officers broke the necks of the bottles of Bordeaux.

I did not neglect the captain meanwhile; he was very well content, for he had already emptied half the bowl. I perceived that the laudanum was taking effect upon all, and when I returned to the officers I found them all very much excited. They were relating their various exploits so noisily that scarcely a word could be heard. On deck the wildest confusion reigned, and the sailors were shouting their horrible pirate songs. The noise lasted about a half an hour and then grew fainter and fainter till it ceased entirely; the opium had done its duty; all lay buried in profound slumber, just where they had been drinking.

The steward and I delayed not an instant in taking advantage of this favourable moment. We immediately put into one of the fishing boats, a cask of water, a brandy flask, a ham and some other provisions, and then provided ourselves with the necessary clothes. I put on my overcoat, into which I had sewed a considerable number of gold-pieces; took a pocket compass, and a good spy glass, and was in the boat in less than five seconds. The steward threw down a bundle and followed me immediately.

We quickly cut the rope that fastened us to the hated schooner, put up the sail, and as the wind was favourable, were soon out of sight of her. We got into the current and shot along like an arrow. I was rather terrified when the moon set, but the stars shone brightly, and the steward was indeed well acquainted with those waters. When the sun rose, we were not more than five leagues from Havana, and as the wind and current continued to be favorable, we sailed into port a little after nine o’clock, heard the bells ringing, and the great city with its threatening fortifications and forest of masts lay before us. We landed, and before a half an hour had elapsed, were in the house of the English consul, relating to him our wonderful escape from the pirates, whom I had served, much against my will, for more than a month.

Two days afterwards, an English frigate set sail for home. I took my passage in it, and after a short, prosperous voyage, landed at Plymouth, my native town.

Captivity among the Japanese

On the fifth of July, A. D., 1811, the Russian sloop of war, Diana, approached Kumachir, one of the most southerly of the Kurile islands, belonging to Japan, for the purpose of seeking shelter in one of its bays against an approaching storm. They were received, on their arrival, by a shower of balls from a fort which commanded the bay. As no one, however, approached the vessel, its commander, Vassillii Golownin, considering this hostile reception as the natural consequence of former deeds of violence perpetrated by his countrymen in those waters, did not return the fire, but endeavored, by means of signs, to make the natives understand that his intentions towards them were friendly, and that he wished to land merely to fill his water casks. After a protracted negotiation, a nearer conference was agreed on, and Golownin was imprudent enough to fall into the snare set for him. But we will let him describe the dangers and sufferings he underwent, in his own words:

After we had cast anchor, says he, in the spot designated to us, I landed with midshipman Moor, the steersman, Chleb Nikow, four sailors, and Alexis, a native of the Kuriles, who acted as interpreter. So deceived were we by the apparent friendliness of the Japanese, that we took no arms with us, except our swords. In order to destroy any distrust they might feel towards us, I ordered our boat to be partly drawn on shore, and left a sailor to watch it. The rest of the men, by my orders, carried after us some chairs, and the presents we intended for the natives. As I entered the fort, I was astonished to find that a large crowd had collected in it. There were at least four hundred soldiers, armed with guns, pikes, and javelins, drawn up in an open space to the right of the gates. Opposite to them was a tent made of striped cotton stuffs, into which we were conducted. The commander of the fort, a stately man, dressed in a complete suit of armor, and wearing two sabres by his side, rose on our entrance, and when we had saluted him, politely begged us to be seated on some benches which were set ready for us. We thanked him for his courtesy, but preferred taking our seats on the chairs which we had brought with us. When we were seated, they served us with tea without sugar, which they carried on lacquered wooden waiters. According to the Japanese custom, the cups were only half full. After we had partaken of it, they supplied us with pipes and tobacco, and the conference began. They first inquired the name and rank of each of us, and then asked repeatedly, and in an insidious manner, where we came from, whither we were going, and why our countrymen had formerly ravaged their northern coasts. When we had returned guarded answers to these questions, they wanted to know how many men were in our vessel. As I thought it prudent to magnify our strength, I replied "a hundred;" but Alexis could not translate this number, and I was obliged to make a hundred marks on a piece of paper, with a pencil, and let the Japanese count them. Whilst they were thus employed, midshipman Moor observed that naked sabres were being distributed among the soldiers, and immediately advised me of the fact; but as we had been so kindly treated, I thought little of the circumstance, especially as they were preparing for us a feast, consisting of rice, fish served up with a green sauce, and many other delicacies, the names of which we did not know. After we had partaken heartily of these solids, and for a drink been given a kind of beer called "Sagic," I declared that we could not stay any longer, and begged them to tell us the price of the meal, which we designed paying for. To this request of mine, they returned very evasive answers, and when they saw that we were tired of the useless and fruitless questioning we had undergone, and were making preparations to depart, they suddenly threw off the mask they had hitherto worn, and by their threatening gestures showed plainly enough what their intentions were. Their chief, who, until the present moment, had spoken in a friendly and pleasant manner, now raised his voice, and pronouncing the name of the Russian who had ravaged their coasts, made a long speech, during which he often fiercely struck his hand on his sword, and ended by swearing that the Emperor would have him cut in two if he suffered a single Russian, who was in his power, to escape. As soon as Alexis, in whose anxious countenance we discovered coming evil, had translated these words to us, we sprang to our feet, and made for the door. The Japanese

immediately set up a loud and threatening cry, but did not attempt to seize us, contenting themselves with throwing oars and blocks of wood in our way, in order that in running we might stumble over them and fall. When we had almost reached the entrance of the fort, they fired a volley at us, but fortunately hit no one, although the balls whistled most unpleasantly near to our heads. We were lucky enough to get out of the fort, and had almost reached our boat, when I saw to my horror that it was lying high and dry on shore, for in our absence the tide had ebbed. As our pursuers were well aware that we could not float it again, and had also made themselves acquainted with the fact that there were no weapons in it, they grew bolder, and surrounded us on all sides, brandishing their huge sabres, which they held in both hands. As resistance in such a case would be little less than madness, we surrendered ourselves to them as their prisoners. They seized me by the arms, and dragged me back to the fort, together with my unhappy companions. On the way a soldier struck me with a small iron rod, but an officer angrily ordered him to desist, and no more blows followed.

They took us into a large building resembling a barrack, which stood on the shore, and having forced us to kneel, bound us with cords of the thickness of one's finger. Over these they lapped thinner ones, which gave us great pain. The Japanese are perfect masters of this art, and we were excellent specimens of their skill. We had about us just the same number of ropes and knots, and were tied in precisely the same parts of our bodies. Cords ran round our breasts and necks, our elbows nearly touched each other behind our backs, and our hands were tied fast together. A long rope was fastened to us, one end of which a Japanese held, and on the least intimation of flight, had only to pull it, and our elbows were painfully pressed together, whilst the ropes around our necks were so tightly drawn, that we were nearly choked. But as if this was not enough, they bound our legs together above the knees and ankles, and then making slip-knots in the ends of some ropes, they put them over our necks, and tied them to the rafters of the building, pulling them so tight that we could not stir. They then searched our pockets, and having taken from them every thing they could find, very coolly lit their pipes and sat down to smoke. Whilst they were binding us, the chief came in, and taking his station in front of us, made a speech, during which he frequently pointed to his mouth, with the intention probably of intimating to us, that at present they had no intention of starving us. In this pitiful and agonizing position we remained for an hour, not knowing what was to be our fate. When I saw them put the ropes over the rafters, I concluded, of course, that their intention was to hang us, and never have I so despised death as I did in that moment; my only wish was, that they would finish the murderous work as soon as possible. But the Japanese, it seemed, had no idea, whatever, of taking such a step. Their sole design and object was to render futile any attempt at escape on our part. After a while they unbound our ankles, loosened the ropes about our knees, and leading us out of the building, conducted us through some cultivated fields into a wood. We were so tightly and skilfully bound that a boy ten years of age might have conducted us in perfect safety, but these anxious and careful people did not think so, for each of us had an especial watchman who held the rope, and an armed soldier to walk by his side. From a hill we saw our vessel for the last time, and with bleeding hearts, bid it and our native land, a long farewell.

II

We walked along in single file, and had proceeded on our journey for about half an hour, when we heard the distant thunder of cannon, and concluded that our vessel must have attacked the fort. I was so tightly bound, especially about the neck, that my face became swollen, and I found that my breath was fast leaving me. I could scarcely swallow, and only with the greatest difficulty, articulate. We repeatedly begged our guards to loosen a little the cords which bound us, but the noise of the cannon had thrown them into such paroxysms of terror that they took no notice whatever of our entreaties, but kept looking back, and urging us to go on faster. Life, at this moment, appeared to me a most intolerable burden, and I made up my mind to get rid of it, by leaping into the next stream of

water we came to. But this determination of mine, I found, was easier to be made than carried out, for whenever we passed over a stream of the smallest size even, our suspicious guards held us tightly by the arms. At last, unable to proceed farther, I sank exhausted and senseless to the ground. When I recovered, I found that blood had flowed from my mouth and nostrils, and that I was sprinkled with water. For the first time, the natives now listened to our entreaties, and loosening our bonds, greatly relieved us, enabling us to proceed on our way with renewed strength.

After walking for about three hours longer, we arrived at a little village, which is situated on the shores of the strait separating Kumachir from the island of Jesso. Here we were led into a house, and rice bread offered us, but as our appetites were entirely gone, they took us into another room, and made us lie down near the walls, so that none of us could communicate with the others. The ropes by which we had been led along, they tied to iron spikes, which were driven into the floor, and they drew off our boots, and again tied our legs as before. When our guards had thus disposed of us to their entire satisfaction, they seated themselves in the middle of the apartment, round a pan of coals, and began to drink tea and smoke tobacco. One would imagine that men might rest in peace even among lions, if they were bound as we were, but the Japanese did not seem to consider themselves safe even now, for they carefully examined our bonds every quarter of an hour or so.

Letters were very often brought to the captain of our guards, which he read attentively, and then communicated their contents to his companions. They conversed, however, in such a low tone of voice, that we saw very well they feared our hearing what they said, though on that subject they might have made themselves perfectly easy, for we did not understand a single word of the Japanese language. Towards midnight they made preparations for departure. A wide board was brought in, to the four corners of which ropes had been attached; through these ropes a pole was put, by means of which they raised it from the ground. They now laid me on the board, and carried me away, which made us fully believe that they were going to separate us, and that we now saw each other for the last time. We, therefore, took leave of each other like dying men, our eyes filled with tears. The farewell of the sailors, which they sobbed aloud, cut me to the heart, for I felt that my imprudence was the cause of all their misery. I was carried to the shore, and laid on a mat in a large boat, and to my joy and surprise they brought down my comrades, one after the other, and laid them near to me. This was so unexpected, and so gratifying, that for a moment I almost forgot my sufferings. They then covered me and my companions with moss, and an armed guard having taken his seat by the side of each of us, they pushed off from the shore. During our journey by water that night, the Japanese kept perfectly quiet. They spoke not a word, and turned a deaf ear to all our lamentations and complaints.

At the break of day we arrived at a little village on the coast of Jesso, where they placed us in several smaller boats, which they drew along the shore by means of ropes. From time to time they offered us rice-broth, and roasted fish, and if any of us wanted to eat, they put the food into his mouth by means of slender sticks, which, in Japan, are used instead of forks.

The good people who had bound us in such an unmerciful manner, from a fear only that we would escape from them, or commit suicide, now showed themselves to be any thing but cruel, for they were even, careful to brush the flies from us with green bushes, which otherwise would have plagued us sadly. After they had carried us along the coast in this manner, for the space of two days, the boats were dragged upon the land, and shoved along by the aid of a large number of people, without either we or our guards being obliged to leave them. They pulled us through thickets and woods, and at last we found ourselves on the top of a high hill. We could not conceive what possible object the Japanese could have in drawing across the land, with so much trouble, boats of no inconsiderable size. We concluded, at last, that they must have seen our vessel, and feared lest they should lose their prize. But the solution of the riddle was soon apparent, for when they had got the boats up to the top of the hill, they allowed them to slide down the other side by the force of their own gravity, and then launched them on a small stream, which, after having navigated for two days, we left in order to continue our journey by land. They loosened the bands from our legs, and having drawn on our boots, asked us

whether we would walk or be carried in litters, by which name they designated boards, some four feet in length, fastened to ropes, by which they were borne along. We chose to walk, and accordingly the chief formed the procession. First walked two of the natives, side by side, with red staves in their hands, who pointed out the way. After them came three soldiers, and then myself. On one side of me walked a soldier, and on the other a servant, who, with a green bush, brushed the flies from me. After me walked a guard, who held the rope that bound me, and then followed people bearing my litter. In the same manner, Moor, Chleb Nikow, and the sailors, were led along, and the procession closed with soldiers and a crowd of servants, who carried the baggage and provisions. Each one of the latter had fastened to his girdle a small wooden tablet, marked so as to designate to which of us he was attached, and what was his duty. During the whole of the journey, the Japanese preserved the same order, and the day was spent in the following manner: At dawn we prepared to start, breakfasted, and set out on our march. At the villages through which we passed, we generally stopped to rest, to drink tea, and smoke tobacco. At noon we dined. An hour after dinner, we started again, and two or three hours before sunset halted for the night, generally in some village, or where a garrison lay. Immediately on our arrival, we were led to the chief's dwelling, and seated on benches, until that magnate reviewed and mustered us. We were then taken to a house appropriated to us, and bound fast to iron clamps. Afterwards they pulled off our boots, and washed our feet with salt and water. We ate regularly three times a day; in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Our food varied very little, consisting of rice-broth, instead of bread, with salted radishes, instead of salt, a mess of greens, balls of pastry, or roasted fish. Sometimes we received mushroom soup, and a hard boiled egg. The food was not measured out to us, but each one was at liberty to eat as much as he pleased. Our drink was generally bad tea, without sugar, and sometimes, though rarely, beer. In this manner we were taken to our place of destination, which was as yet unknown to us.

By degrees they loosened the ropes, which had been put round our necks, and when, after a time, a man of higher rank took the command of our party, he permitted our hands to be untied, so that we could feed ourselves. Only when we were carried across some strait or river, did they bind us so unmercifully tight, and this did not happen often, nor last long. Our conductors were very careful of us, and carried their caution and watchfulness so far, that for a long time they would not suffer us to approach the shore. However, as we pleaded hard to be allowed to do so, because we could walk so much easier on the wet sand, they at last gave a reluctant consent, taking care to keep between us and the water, even where they were obliged to wade in it. When, also, they allowed us to smoke pipes, they held them with both hands, or fastened to the mouth-pieces wooden balls of the size of hen's eggs, for they seemed to imagine that if we were not restrained, we would choke ourselves with them. We laughed heartily at this proceeding, and made them understand, by signs, that it was much easier to strangle ourselves with these balls than with pipe-stems. At this they laughed too, but told us that they had most positive orders to prevent us in every possible way from committing suicide. They were so very anxious about our health, that they watched us from the tops of our heads to the soles of our feet, carried us across the smallest brooks or puddles, and asked us every morning how we felt.

On the eighth of August, we arrived at Khakodade, a large town, which they told us was to be our abode for the present. An immense multitude came forth to meet us. The road was lined on both sides with spectators, but they behaved themselves very soberly, none of them betraying in their looks, as I saw to my satisfaction, either hatred, scorn, or malicious pleasure; still less did they attempt to annoy us with either mockery or outrage. After we had passed through the town gates, and a long and very narrow street, we turned into a by-lane, and saw on a high piece of ground before us, which was surrounded by an earthen wall and thick-set hedge, and guarded by armed soldiers, a building which was, perhaps, to be our prison during life.

As soon as we entered we were mustered by an officer, according to the instructions given him by the captain of our guards, and then led farther into the court, where we saw a large, dark shed, in which stood cages made of strong bars of wood, and resembling bird-cages in every thing but

size. After the Japanese had taken counsel among themselves for some time, as to how they should dispose of us, they led me along a passage, and forced me to go into one of the little apartments, which was partitioned off by means of wooden posts. I looked around for my companions, and judge of my horror, when I found that they had vanished. After the guards had taken off my bonds, and also, taken off my boots, they fastened the door of my cage, without saying a word, and left me to myself. The thought that I was separated from my comrades, overcame me, and I threw myself on the ground in despair.

III

I had lain there, almost unconscious, for some time, when I perceived a man at the window, who, by signs, invited me to approach him. As I did so, he handed me through the grating, a couple of little sweet cakes, and signified to me that I was to eat them quickly, without letting any one see me do so, for if that was to happen it might be all the worse for him. Although at this moment I felt a positive aversion towards all kinds of food, yet with a great exertion, I gulped them both down, because I did not wish either to anger or injure him. He now left me, with a pleased countenance, promising to provide me in future, with the same kind of food. I thanked him as well as I was able, and wondered not a little, that a man, who to judge from his appearance, was of the lowest rank in life, should possess so much goodness of heart, as to resolve on comforting a stranger, at his own peril. Pretty soon they brought me food, but as I had not the least appetite, I sent it back untouched, as I did again in the evening.

One object now wholly occupied my thoughts, and that was my escape from imprisonment. With this view I examined my cage very carefully. It was six feet long, about as broad, and some eight feet high. Tolerably thick beams separated it from the passage, and in the wall were a couple of windows, having on the outside, a strong wooden grating, and within, paper curtains which could be rolled up or let down. From one of these windows you looked out on a wall about two feet distant, but the other commanded a beautiful view of mountains, fields, and the sea. All the furniture which the apartment could boast of, was a little bench, so small that one could hardly lie down on it, and some mats spread out on the floor.

I was thoroughly convinced that with the aid of an ordinary knife, it would be very easy to cut through the wooden grating of the window, and that in a dark night, I could, with very little difficulty, find my way into the court-yard and over the wall. But then, where was the knife to come from, when they had not trusted us with even a needle? And suppose that I was lucky enough to escape, whither could I turn my steps? The fear too of aggravating the already hard lot of my companions, turned aside any ideas which I might have entertained of attempting a flight. Moreover, our guards were not by any means remiss in their duties. During the whole night, I heard very plainly, people walking round the walls, and striking the hours by means of a couple of dry sticks. My attendants too came very often into the entry with a light, in order to see what I was doing. Before night set in, they brought me a thick cotton covering, and a night-gown, wide and wadded, but which smelt so badly, as it was old and dirty, that I threw it aside into one corner of my cage.

On the following morning, whilst every thing was yet still, I heard, to my great joy, some Russian words very plainly pronounced. I sprang up from the bench on which I was lying, and going to the window, which looked out on the next building, heard midshipman Moor in conversation with one of the sailors. Most fervently did I thank God for this unexpected discovery, for I now knew that my companions not only were under the same roof, but were not imprisoned in separate cells, and had, therefore, opportunity for comforting each other, and making the time appear shorter. After several days, during which the tedious and solitary life I led had well nigh driven me to despair, there walked into my cell a Japanese officer, whom I took to be of some rank and importance. After lamenting that they had thus far been obliged to confine me by myself, he agreeably surprised me by asking

which of the sailors I would like to have as a companion? I replied that they were all equally dear to me, and that I wished to have them all with me in turns; he immediately gave orders to have my wish attended to. I asked him if the Japanese intended to treat us always in this manner?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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