

MARY READ AND ANN BONNY

FIRST AND ONLY WOMEN PIRATES

Part of the Tragic History of the Spanish Main Has Been Overlooked by Fiction Writers and Comic Opera Librettists—Rare Book in Le Moyne Collection Records Depredations of Feminine Buccaneers.

REPUBLIC SPECIAL

New York, Nov. 11.—Nothing in the mimic world but has a counterpart in the real.

That the picturesque, fetching petitcoated pirates with which comic opera has fed the eye and charmed the ear for generations sprung as full-fledged from the imagination of a librettist as Minerva from the brain of thundering Jove is so deeply rooted in popular belief that it is rather disconcerting at this day to discover that less than two hundred years ago "really real" women pirates made no little noise in the world.

The story of the daredevil adventures of Mary Read and Anne Bonny was knocked down the other day for \$9 in an auction-room at the sale of the library of the scholarly comedian, William J. Le Moyne. It forms the kernel of the remarkable work, "A History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates, London, 1734," now one of the rarest and quaintest bits of Americana.

The two small volumes, with curious wood and copper plates, are the first and only records extant of private outlaws.

"They contain," to quote Mr. Broadhurst, the Colonial historian, "a greater quantity of Colonial history of British America than anywhere extant."

From the adventures of Captain Avery, who pirated the coast of New England, and Teach, known as "Blackbeard," with fourteen wives, captured in James River by Lieutenant Maynard, not to forget the immortal Captain Kidd, the volume is replete with stories of some score of villains who have served to whet the imagination of not a few of the world's most popular sea novelists.

Captain Johnson, the author, was an old English sea rover. The facts recorded he personally gathered from the participants and their associates. His recital has all the direct simplicity, the indelicate truthfulness of Scriptural narrative of early Elizabethan drama.

No pirate knew our waters better than this blunt old sea dog. The account of his own capture, detention and ransom by the Indians on the Ohio River (1709) is now scarcely less valuable Americana than his masterpiece, which he apologizes in the preface for calling a history, since he tells us "it's nothing but the actions of a parcel of robbers."

This parcel of robberies is the quarry from which Marryat, J. Clarke Russell, Pyle and hosts of lesser writers are said to have builded their sea romances, while Robert Louis Stevenson had more than passing acquaintance with the record. How Mary Read and Bonny Anne escaped their nets seems passing strange.

WORSE THAN MEN.

In boldness and daring no less than self-sacrificing courage these women pirates were not surpassed by any of the picturesque freebooters with whom their fortune was cast and whose deeds were enshrined in song and story.

Externally these first and only recorded women pirates had little in common with the gaily caparisoned feminine pirates of polite romance or comic opera.

Despite the donning of real breeches, braving every hardship and peril known to the twenty heroes of Johnson's history, and with not a few of whom they fought hand to hand with sword or pistol, Mary Read and Anne Bonny were genuine women, if not "perfect ladies."

They would have gone to their graves their sex unsuspected by their fierce and bloodthirsty companions had not Cupid found them out.

As with not a few of their tinsel counterparts, the little blind god was their undoing. Both were tried for their lives in Jamaica in 1720 and condemned to death, but escaped execution because of their condition. Both died in prison.

"As to the lives of our female pirates, we must confess," says the author, "that they may appear a little extravagant, yet they are nevertheless true. As they were publicly tried for their piracies, there are living witnesses (1734) enough to testify to what we have laid down concerning them. If there are some incidents and turns in their stories which may give them a little the air of a novel, they are not invented for that purpose; it is a kind of reading with which this author is little acquainted, but as he himself was exceedingly diverted with them when they were related to him he thought they might have the same effect upon the reader."

Mary Read was an English girl. Her mother married a man who followed the sea. Soon after the wedding he sailed away and never came back. In time a son was born. When the infant was about a year old the widow met with an accident. To avoid disgrace she sought the country.

There Mary Read was born quiet upon the heels of the death of the legitimate son. When Mary was 4 years old her mother put her into boy's clothes, and taking her up to London passed her off on her husband's mother as his son.

The old lady was delighted and wanted to adopt the boy. This the mother would not consent to, saying it would break her heart to part with him. The gullible old lady then gave the mother a guinea a week for its support. Shortly after she lost her money and died. Mary and her mother fell into dire distress. She was told at this crisis of her sex. She was

now 12; and handsome as a picture. She hired out as a footboy to a French Countess. But conventional life soon wearied her.

ENLISTED ON MAN-OF-WAR.

She enlisted on a 'man-of-war. After spirited engagements she quitted the service and went to Flanders.

There as a cadet she carried arms in a foot regiment and won praise for bravery, her sex never being suspected. While-deserving a commission she could not obtain one, as they were bought and sold, and this feminine soldier of fortune was penniless.

Spilling for new fields to conquer, she quit the foot regiment and joined a horse guard, where her bravery and good behavior won the esteem of the officers. Her advance was assured, when she fell in love with her messemate, a handsome young fellow.

Mars and Venus could not be served at the same time. The once model horseman now grew negligent of duty. The arms and decorations she always kept in such fine order were allowed to tarnish. When Fleming was ordered out Mary went with him, without command of her superior officer and at great danger to her life.

The rest of the troopers, little suspecting the secret, thought she was mad. Fleming was at a loss to account for her actions, but with the ingenuousness of love, however, the foolish little trooper at length revealed her sex to Fleming.

MADE HER HIS WIFE.

Her attitude captured the messemate's heart, who courted her in all honesty for his wife. When the horse guards marched into winter quarter Mary Read bought woman's apparel, and they were publicly married. They set up an eating-house at the Sign of the Three Horse Shoes, near the castle in Breda. It was the rendezvous of the regiments of all the countryside and fortune smiled.

It was, however, short-lived happiness, for soon the husband died. Vicissitudes followed closely, and in despair Mary again donned man's apparel and set out for Holland. There she joined a regiment quartered in a frontier town, but soon shipped for the West Indies.

When a few days out the ship was captured by pirates. Being the only Englishman aboard, the pirates kept Mary, together with the ship's plunder. She sailed with the pirate crew for some time, until the King's proclamation, pardoning all pirates who voluntarily surrendered, was taken advantage of by her captors. All went ashore and lived in apparent content until their money gave out.

Hearing that Captain Wood Rogers, Governor of the Island of Providence, was fitting out a privateer to cruise against the Spaniards, Mary joined the crew. They had not sailed far when the crew, Mary included, turned against the commander and took up the old trade of pirating.

Mary Read always declared she abhorred the life of a pirate, and only followed it under compulsion. Men who sailed with her, however, swore under oath at the trial for her life that there was no pirate afloat more resolute in undertaking hazardous ventures than Mary Read. In one of the fiercest conflicts with a man-of-war none kept deck but Mary Read, Anne Bonny and one other.

"Come up and fight like men," cried Mary to those slinking under deck. Not a man stirred. Down the hole Mary fired, killing one man and wounding others. This evidence she denied at the trial.

During all her life at sea, as on land, her sex was never suspected, until, disguised as a man, Anne Bonny came aboard this particular ship, having eloped from North Carolina with its commander, Captain Rackam, that picturesque pirate who has sat for hero to more than one sea romance.

Anne Bonny made known to Mary Read that she was a woman in man's disguise. In self-defense Mary was forced to share her secret with Anne.

During this cruise Captain Rackam's ship captured many vessels belonging to Jamaica and the West Indies, bound to and from England.

Whenever there was a good artist or anybody aboard who could be of service to the pirate company he was retained by consent or force.

Among the forced retainers was a handsome young English artist, to whom Mary straightway lost her heart. The young man quarreled with a pirate, and when the ship anchored at an island, they went ashore, as was the custom, to fight it out.

The woman's heart was torn with disquiet, so great was her fear that her sweetheart would not be equal to his foe's skill. Not for worlds would she have him refuse the challenge and be branded a coward.

Fearing more for his life than her own, she picked a quarrel with the pirate and, naming the time of meeting two hours before that set for her lover's duel, she fought the pirate with sword and killed him on the spot.

HER CONVICTION.

Then the two united their fortunes. At the famous trial, where her husband was acquitted and she condemned to death, Mary Read refused to give her name and declared he was an honest man. She was convicted on the evidence of Captain Rackam.

Thinking Mary Read was a man, Captain Rackam, thinking, he once asked her