

Two Female Buccaneers

ONE of the most cogent arguments advanced against the granting of the suffrage to women is based upon the claim that they can not fight.

It is held that a country should not be ruled by those who are unable to engage in war for its rights and preservation.

But history demonstrates that women can fight, not only with their brains as leaders, such as Zenobia, Boadicea and Joan of Arc, but with brawn and muscle and the stout courage generally associated with men.

Two shining examples of female prowess upon the blood stained field of battle have been furnished in

according to the pirates' common law. At one time, when her husband was challenged to fight a duel with a man his superior in dexterity, Mary met his challenger first and slew him with sword and pistol, thus probably saving the life of the man she loved.

When finally captured and charged with piracy, she was asked why she had adopted such a life and if she did not see the folly of engaging in it when the penalty was hanging. To this she answered bravely that "she thought hanging no great hardship, for, were it not for that, every cowardly fellow would turn pirate and so infest the seas that men of courage would starve." She was found guilty and sentenced to death, but died in prison before the sentence was executed.

Ann Bonny was the illegitimate daughter of a



Ann Bonny and Mary Read convicted of Piracy Nov. 28th 1720 at a Court of Vice Admiralty held at S. Jago de la Vega in y. Island of Jamaica

the exciting lives of Mary Read and Ann Bonny, two female pirates of the eighteenth century, whose deeds of valor were such as to win the admiration of their fighting companions of the sterner sex and even to inspire the latter to fiercer struggles.

Mary Read was born in London, but her mother, from poverty, was constrained to dress her in boy's clothes and enter her in the service of a wealthy French lady as a page. Domestic service was too dull for the youthful Mary, however, and she yielded to her naturally adventurous disposition, ran away and enlisted as a soldier in an infantry regiment of the French army during the wars in Flanders. She distinguished herself by her bravery on many a stubbornly contested battlefield, but finally fell in love with a young officer, who, however, did not suspect her sex until she revealed it after having risked her life for his. They were married, but the young husband died, and, the peace of Rysivick having been declared, the restless widow sailed for the West Indies, wearing male attire, in a ship that was captured by English pirates. The piratical life appealed to her stormy nature and she enrolled herself among the buccaneers, with whom she joined in ravaging the Spanish main in the strenuous times when piracy was the curse of the Caribbean sea.

It is related of Mary Read that she was always foremost in the fray, and that upon one occasion, when the men of her party were driven below by the enemy, she and another woman disguised as a man, who was none other than Ann Bonny, stood to their posts, with cutlass and battleax, dealing death right and left in a hand to hand encounter. Calling upon the men, the two women rallied them and brought them again to the deck, where, inspired by their female companions, they continued the fight until victory was won.

Strange to relate, Mary Read was of extraordinary modesty and preserved her virtue in the midst of her dissolute companions, even after her sex was discovered. She finally again fell in love with a young pirate and was wedded to him with strange ceremony

wealthy English barrister and a serving maid. She was sent to America and there met and married a worthless fellow, but, meeting in the West Indies the famous pirate Rackam, about 1720, she deserted her husband and became Rackam's mistress. Disguised as a man, she accompanied Rackam on his plundering voyages and on every occasion fought side by side with the pirates with a courage and skill that few of them excelled.

When the king of England issued a proclamation granting pardon to all the buccaneers who would, within a certain time, surrender and abandon their lawless calling, Captain Rackam and his paramour availed themselves of it, and, being bred to the sea, they engaged in the lawful occupation of privateering in the wars between England and Spain. From privateering to piracy, especially in those times and in the West Indies, was but a step, and Rackam and Ann Bonny, upon a stout, swift, well armed vessel, with a reckless crew, could not resist the temptation to return to their old calling. They went upon many expeditions and garnered much loot, but the English men of war harried them and they were finally captured and tried for piracy. Rackam was found guilty and hanged. Just before his execution Ann saw him in prison and the only comfort that she gave him was to say that "she was sorry to see him there, but if he had fought like a man he need not have been hanged like a dog."

Ann herself was found guilty and sentenced to the gallows, but was reprieved from time to time, and her final fate is not known, although it is certain that she was never hanged. The prevailing belief of historians of that period is that she was either quietly released through the favor of some one in power or was permitted to escape, as she had an infant while in jail.

During all the long decades that piracy flourished in the West Indies the valorous deeds of Mary Read and Ann Bonny were narrated by their fellow pirates for each other's incitement to ferocious fighting, for even the most lukewarm desperado among them would not show the white feather with these examples of woman's warlike prowess before them.