

Old Book, Just Come to Light, Tells Stirring Stories of Old Days When Women Pirates Were Abroad

Pirates and petticoats on first blush do not seem to blend, but history, nevertheless, records the fact that less than 200 years ago there were real women pirates.

Only the other day an old book detailing the dare-devil adventures of Mary Read and Anne Bonny was knocked down for \$39 in an auction room at the sale of the library of the venerable comedian, William J. Le Moyne.

Just "Robbers' Whims."

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 in 1700 is now scarcely less valuable American than his masterpiece, for which he apologizes in the preface for calling it a history, since he tells us "It's nothing but the actions of a parcel or robbers."

This parcel of robbers is the quarry from which Marryatt, 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 Anne Bonny escaped their nets seemed strange. 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 are 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 is 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. 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 (1724) 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 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. When Mary was four years old her mother put her into boy's clothes, and, taking her up to London, Mary and her mother fell into dire distress. She was told at this crisis of her sex. She was now thirteen and handsome as a picture. She hired out as a footboy to a French countess. But conventional life soon wearied her and she enlisted on a man-of-war. After spirited engagements she left 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. Spoiling 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 messmate, a handsome young fellow named Fleming.

Sailed With Pirates.

When but a few days out the ship was captured by pirates. Being the only English person 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 on deck but Mary Read, Anne Bonny and one other.

Eloped With Pirate.

Anne Bonny's father, when she was five years old, put her into boy's clothes, installed her in an establishment, giving out that she was a relative's child whom he intended to educate to be his clerk. Losing his business and repute soon after, the father left for new parts where, embarking as a merchant, he accumulated money, bought a vessel and sailed for the American coast.

In his North Carolina plantation Anne, who had resumed petticoats, was much courted. She was widely sought, and her father had great matrimonial expectations for her. But Anne was captured by a worthless spendthrift, who, when he found her father disowned her, shipped with her to the island of Providence in search of work. There Anne Bonny fell in love with the dare-devil Captain Rackam, and, discarding her husband, donned trousers and eloped with the pirate.—Boston Post.