TALES FOR THE MARINES

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649717606

Tales for the Marines by Henry Gringo

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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FOR

THE MARINES.

BY

HARRY GRINGO.

(LIEUTENANT WISE.)

AUTHOR OF "LOS GRINGOS."

"Nought but one long tale was left
In that once peaceful dwelling:
And a very tough one, too, it was,—
The same that I've been telling."

LONDON:
WARD AND LOCK, 158, FLEET STREET;
1855.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY PETTER AND GALPIN, PLAYHOUSE YARD,
ADJOINING THE "TIMES" OFFICE.

PREFACE.

As far back as the reign of old Canute the Dane, and King Alfred of Britain, when navies were first built, down to the present time, there has existed a popular superstition, that every item of a romantic or intellectual complexion which happens on shipboard is immediately communicated to the Marines.

It would be preposterous in any mild-mannered mariner of this century to gainsay so time-hallowed a tradition; and, under the conviction that the Anglo-Saxon world on land are somewhat curiously inclined to know what really is told to the Marines, I have employed—as I trust the reader will admit after a careful perusal of these Tales—considerable labour and research in preparing the only authentic records of the kind that have yet appeared in print.

HARRY GRINGO.

TALES FOR THE MARINES.

CHAPTER I.

"Now for the pirates, uncle," said Fred to the Lieutenant, as the boy planted both elbows on the table, and looked up into his relative's face with an earnest gaze; "Uncle, do let us have the yarn you promised about the pirates."

The Lieutenant could not, apparently, resist the eager looks which complimented him through the youngster's eyes; and so he placed an unlighted cheroot between his incisors, and began as follows:—

I intend to tell you of my first cruise in the Juniata, for the incidents connected with it made a very vivid impression upon me at the time, which has never yet been effaced. It is now considerably more than a score of years, my boy, when I was scarcely bigger than you, when I left school and was placed under my good old grandfather's care, who gave me a boat and fowling piece, and intrusted me to the charge of a coloured man on the estate, named Kit Dolphin. Kit had been born and bred in the family, and had, as he always boasted, "minded" my father. All the denizens of the plantation loved and respected Christopher, for he was as brave and sagacious as an elephant, and withal as kind and gentle as a woman. In the war of 1812, Kit had followed my father to sea; and in one of the bloodiest actions, he had been wounded by a bursting fuse, which had left a nearly white mark, in a broad stripe from the lower part of his cheek, straight up across the eye and forehead. In person

Kit was a very Atlas in muscle; and though scarcely above the ordinary height, his heavy, square shoulders and deep chest, with arms woven like the wire of a suspension bridge, layer upon layer, of hard, seasoned thews and sinews, made him more than a match for any two men you would meet in a week. Added to this prodigious strength, he was a man of great and tried endurance and singular activity, whether afloat or on shore.

But still he was the best and kindest creature in existence, and his smile, lighted up by the comical white seam in his face, made us shout with merriment whenever we met him. He was born a slave, but my father had given him his freedom out of love for his early playmate; and although Kit at times would ramble away for a few months, on short voyages to the West Indies, or along our own coast, still he always returned to the land where he was reared. Here he had a freehold of a small house and bit of land resting on an arm of the bay, where he was universally acknowledged as the king of the seine, and superintendent-in-chief of all the boats, oyster-beds, and fishing spots pertaining to the plantation.

The early affection which he had felt for my father he transferred to me, and many's the hour the faithful black has held me in his arms, and related to me, with wonderful powers of description, the scenes he had witnessed "beyond seas;" and through all my waywardness and impatience of restraint, he never lost his rare good humour, or chided me with an unkind word. Once, however, I remember that when I had proved fractious beyond all reasonable measure, the cautious Christopher had devised the happy expedient of curbing my childish rambles, by digging a hole in the sandy flats of the sea beach, and there immersing me up to the armpits, while he pursued his search for soft crabs.

My grandfather had been, until far advanced in life, a capital sportsman both in the chase and with the gun. Kit had been a pupil of his master in these sports, and by him I was taught to handle the fowling piece and pistol, and dash through a pine forest on a thorough-bred horse without a thought of accident.

Here I led a very delightful existence for more than a year, paddling about the lagoons, shooting game, sailing, hunting, and fishing, until one unlucky morning I chanced to

deliver a full charge of fine shot into the breeches of a French gentleman, who had taken the liberty of landing from a vessel in the bay, and, without leave or license, was exercising his skill upon the woodcock in a small marsh which I had especially set aside for my own amusement. The French gentleman, thereupon, raised such a noise and commotion that it even attracted the attention of my grandfather, who had very recently declared his disapprobation of previous frolicsome exploits, by intimating, in good set terms, that he "wished the boy was with the devil, and that he had ten thousand dollars for him." After the Frenchman had been heard, pacified, and carried off to his vessel, with the shot carefully picked out of his breeches, and his wounds decently dressed, the vessel fortunately sailing that afternoon for Bordeaux, my turn came, and Kit not being near to shield or excuse me, in furtherance of the benevolent wish expressed by my grandfather, it was determined that I should be, as Kit expressed it, "hustled" off to sea.

The navy was the branch of the profession chosen. An appointment as midshipman was soon procured through the influence of a noble-hearted relative in power, and within a month I was hurried away to a dockyard, where, until a vessel was ready, I was ordered to attend the naval school.

There was a large class of old midshipmen at this embryo college, from whom, being a boy of considerable observation, I picked up a great many of the first rudiments of knowledge requisite for the profession I was about to embark in; but in the way of books, I am sorry to add, I gave very little heed to my teacher, or his lessons, or threats. My chief delight was, with two or three other sucklings of sailors, in rolling round shot about the lower decks of a frigate on the stocks, until the master carpenter complained of us.

The orders for sea service soon came, and with as nice a kit as ever a reefer had, I proceeded to join my ship. Speaking of kits, said the Lieutenant, turning to his nephew, it's the most ill-judged thing in the world to carry too much with one to sea, as it is on the other hand not to take enough. Now, in my time I've seen boys carry chests as big as piano-fortes, crammed with every useless article imaginable, from a plum-cake to long silk stockings; and then, again, I have known lads with only a couple of shirts, which they were obliged of