

**TOUGH YARNS: A SERIES OF NAVAL
TALES AND SKETCHES TO PLEASE ALL
HANDS, FROM THE SWABS ON THE
SHOULDERS DOWN TO THE SWABS IN
THE HEAD, IN TWO VOLUMES, VOL. II**

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Tough Yarns: A Series of Naval Tales and Sketches to Please All Hands, from the Swabs On the Shoulders Down to the Swabs in the Head, in two Volumes, Vol. II by Matthew Henry Barker (The Old Sailor)

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MATTHEW HENRY BARKER (THE OLD SAILOR)

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TOUGH YARNS;

A SERIES

OF

NAVAL TALES AND SKETCHES

TO PLEASE ALL HANDS,

From the *Boards on the Spigons* down to the *Boards in the Ship.*

BY THE OLD SAILOR,

AUTHOR OF "GREENWICH HOSPITAL," ETC.

Matthew Henry Barker

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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TOUGH YARNS.

GHOST STORIES.

Glendower.—I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

Hotspur.—Why, so can I; or so can any man:
But will they come when you do call for them?"

King Henry IV.

I wish my young readers had been acquainted with my worthy and excellent father, for he cared not a snap of the finger for ghosts and hobgoblins, and he would actually walk through a churchyard at midnight without feeling the smallest particle of fear. Now, it may be supposed that his children (of whom I was the third) were naturally as courageous as their father; but from certain circumstances this was not the case. For whilst my worthy sire would have bidden defiance to a whole army of apparitions, myself and my brothers (there were five of us) would tremble at every noise after dusk, and when we were in bed,

bury our faces in the blankets, lest something alarming should appear: nay more, not one of us would remain a moment in the dark without screaming, even if persons were in the same room; or be left alone in any place, though it was broad daylight and the sun shining in all his splendour.

I have said that my father was courageous; but then what ghost would have dared to attack him, or ventured to appear in his presence? He had fought many battles; he had braved the wind, and the storm, and the howling tempest: he had undauntedly looked death in the face, and the unrelenting tyrant had plundered him on every possible occasion, in his violent efforts to carry him off altogether. Thus the brave man had at different times lost an eye, and an arm, the calf of his right leg, and sundry slicings and cuttings from various parts of his really handsome person; so that a thought of frightening him never could have entered the mind of any supernatural being,—at least, of any rational one. This was the opinion of us boys respecting our father; but as to ourselves, it was quite another thing. We were children, and ghosts might rub their cold noses against our faces in the night, or start up out of the ground to terrify us during the day with impunity; for that there were such things as ghosts it would have been impossible to entertain a mo-

ment's doubt, having, as we certainly had, the undisputed authority of Susan the housemaid, backed by the matter-of-fact accounts of Jane the cook, and the whole fully authenticated by old nurse, who declared that she had actually seen a spirit; but I suspect it was at a time when *spirits* were pretty plentiful with her.

My parents were much out in company, and then the evenings were employed in telling the most horrible tales of murders, of sudden deaths, and of those who shortened their brief span of life on account of disappointments in love. Oh! how often has a cold sick shuddering come upon my young heart at pictures of the diabolical cruelty of human nature, when "man became a wolf to man!" and how has terror shaken every joint in my childish frame to hear of the restless spirit of the murdered, clothed in corporeal semblance, escaping from its cold prison-house to haunt the guilty slayer! How frequently have the tears trickled down my pale face at the hapless adventures of blighted affection; and many a time did my infantile imagination follow the retributive form that constantly haunted the wretch who had broken the vow of fidelity and truth! Nor was there wanting a good sprinkling of *accurate* stories about highwaymen and housebreakers, gentlemen thieves for whom young maids wept when they considered them deserving a better fate.

The house we lived in was a very ancient but strong building, and exactly the sort of place to excite superstitious feelings—in fact, a sort of ghostery. There were some strange tales told about it; and the unaccountable noises in the chimneys which frightened the birds that built their nests there, and the hollow murmuring sounds that proceeded, particularly in windy weather, from behind the old oak panels of the rooms, all conspired to do that which my parents had but little idea of,—namely, to unnerve the system and weaken the intellect.

Still I was no coward, for I would always defend myself against any boy of my size, and was ready to undertake the usual hazardous enterprises of children; but a subtle poison was working within, which bade fair to render the mind imbecile, and to undermine the constitution. My parents became sensible of our altered condition, and when it was almost beyond redemption, were made acquainted with the cause. My father, in his usual blunt manner, made use of a strong argument against ghosts. "Boys," said he, "you are a pack of fools: remember this, that those who are gone to Heaven, are too happy to quit it; and those who are gone to a place of torment, the devil won't part with even for a moment." Of course a change took place among the servants, who were blamed for instilling pernicious princi-

ples into our minds, but which they could not have done had my parents used a little more watchfulness to guard against it.

I was destined for the sea, and at an early age to sea I went. But though I had risen superior to many apprehensions which once tortured me, yet there were times when I could not entirely conquer former weaknesses; and a few weeks after the frigate to which I belonged had left Plymouth on a three months' cruise, one of the quarter-masters of the name of Buckley died, and, as is the usual custom, the body was sewed up in a hammock preparatory to interment. The poor fellow had expired late in the afternoon, and the committal of the corpse to the deep was to take place the following morning. Now Buckley had shown me a great deal of kindness, and taught me to knot and splice, and other parts of a seaman's duty; besides, he had always slept at no great distance from me, and both of us were in the same watch; yet I could not subdue the horror I felt struggling in my breast, at the thoughts of passing the night near the cock-pit where I supposed the dead man to be laid. I dared not mention a word of this to my messmates, lest it should have ruined my character for ever; and as I was to take the morning watch, I went early to my hammock—but not to sleep. The close proximity to the corpse excited the most sick-