

MARYLAND GAZETTE.

[LVIIIth YEAR.]

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Episcallany.

From the Monthly Magazine.

Account of the Sufferings of the Crews of two Booners, part of the Squadron of General Miranda, which were taken by two Spanish Guarracas, in June, 1806. Written by one of the Sufferers who made his escape.

(Concluded from our last.)

FTER witnessing the execution of their ten companions, the prisoners remained in confinement without any alteration of their situation, except, from the heat of the weather and the weight of their irons, their sufferings were more insupportable than they had experienced. They anxiously wished for the day when they were to be taken out for the purpose of being removed to their respective places of servitude; in as much as they cherished a hope, that some auspicious circumstance might favour an escape. The expected day arrived on the 7th of August, when they were all examined, their irons inspected, and more firmly rivetted upon them; and at 4 o'clock P. M. taken out and carried aboard of an armed merchant ship (the Prince of Wales), of ten guns, for the purpose of being conveyed to Carthagena, an extensive seaport town, situated on the Main, about three hundred leagues from Porto Rico. At the mouth of the harbour of this place, is situated Bocca Chica, whither a portion of the prisoners had been sentenced. At this place the remainder were to remain, as they could be conveniently transported to their destined places.

The prisoners were all placed between the deck and guarded by about fifty soldiers, and on board, exclusive of the ship's crew, that purpose. In consequence of this, it was extremely difficult to put in execution any effectual plan for the purpose of regaining their liberty, notwithstanding the indolence of the soldiers, who spent the greater part of their time either sleeping or loafing. Several schemes were concerted, and all frustrated. Preparations were made at one time for ridding themselves of their irons, which was to be effected during the night; when they were to rise upon the deck, take command of the vessel, and carry into some port where they might effect their escape. Had this bold attempt been undertaken without success, several lives, no doubt, would have been lost. Their situation was desperate; and desperate means were necessary to be attempted. Just before the appointed day arrived, they were surprised to see a number of the guards about their persons, and themselves examined, and their irons inspected. This excited a suspicion that some one of their number, whose name failed him, had betrayed them.

Two or three at a time had been permitted to go upon deck; during the daytime, and in an hour or two in the fresh air. These favours were attributed to the fear of the commander, of being captured by some English vessel with whom they might fall in due to their voyage; when their severe treatment might be retaliated. The prisoners, finding they had failed in their scheme, had recourse to another. It was agreed and agreed to, that in case they did not happen to fall into the hands of the English, before they should reach Carthagena, they would, at a time to be agreed upon, descend into the magazine room, and set off a lighted cigar, set fire to the powder, and put an end, at once, to their sufferings, by blowing themselves and the vessel up of existence. This scheme met with some ill success as the former.

They were now arrived in sight of Carthagena, and all hopes of being captured or of escape were gone. Just as they were making port, an English frigate, hove in sight, and all chase after them—but she was too late. An uncommon fatality seemed to attend all the prospects of relief. They arrived in Carthagena on the 17th of Aug. 1806, after a voyage of ten days.

In the next day they were all taken out and marched up through the gate of the walls of the town, and through the town to the prison, to receive them. The sorrowful appearance of the prisoners made in marching along their irons through the town (about 47 in number) not having any thing upon their feet, but exposed to the hot sun—without anything upon their feet and in rags, drew a multitude of Spaniards to behold them. With difficulty they could make head through them. The shabby appearance of the majority of the inhabitants showed, that the prisoners were not entirely out of fashion in their tattered dress.

After arriving at the place of confinement, they were separated and put into three different rooms or holes, almost destitute of the light of the sun; cut off from the circulation of the air; hot, filthy, and without anything to rest their heads upon but the bare ground. Whilst reflecting upon these sorrowful regions of despair, they were comforted by the information from their keeper, that these were only temporary places of confinement, until another one was fitted up.

The prison which was fitted up to receive the prisoners was adjacent to, and formed a part of, the walls of the town, or the walls of the town formed the back wall of the prison—the front facing in upon the town. The walls were made of stone and lime, about 12 or 13 feet thick. The rooms or cells, in which the prisoners were to be confined, were about 90 feet long and about 30 wide. There were no windows or holes to let in light, except through the gratings of the door, where the guard was placed—a few small air holes led through the back of the prison; and sentinels were placed upon the top of the prison walls. The floor of the prison was made of bricks, which formed the only pillows the prisoners had to lay their heads upon. To this prison all were removed after remaining several days in their temporary places of confinement, except those who were sentenced to labour at Bocca Chica. They were taken out and commenced their term of servitude, of which mention will be made afterwards. This prison, although of a similar make to the first, they were happy to find, afforded them more room, more air, and more light.

They were now reduced to the number of twenty-eight, who were all confined in one apartment. Their irons were examined and more strongly rivetted upon them. Those irons consisted of two heavy clevises which were placed round the ankles, at the ends of which were holes, and through these ran an iron bolt, fastening them upon the ankles; and joining one ankle with the other, at about six inches apart, just enabling them to limp along, by hitching one foot before the other. These irons weighed about 20 or 25 pounds weight. At first their ankles became so galled by them, which continually fretted the flesh whenever they attempted to exercise, that it was with difficulty they could walk about the floor of the prison. At length having grown lank and thin by the loss of flesh, they were enabled to raise the irons almost up to the knees, and by means of strings tied to the bolts and round their necks, kept them in that situation, by which they were much relieved in walking.

Their keeper was an old Spaniard, and a sergeant of the guards. He was intrusted with the superintendence of all the prisoners in confinement. He kept a kind of provision shop, near the prison, and was the purveyor of the prisoners, and supplied them, in behalf of the government, with food. The prisoners were served twice a day, with a sort of fare, consisting of boiled plantains, rice and water, and sometimes a small piece of fish. About one pint of this pottage was served out to each, in the fore part of the day; and towards evening the same repeated. In some seasons of the year, when vegetables and food were not so plenty, they were scantied to a little rice and water, or a boiled plantain or two, scarcely sufficient to support nature. Their allowance was eighteen pence per day. This was paid to the old sergeant, who for one shilling a piece supplied them with those two meals a day, and the surplus six-pence he paid them. This money they either laid out in buying more food or some kind of covering for their bodies, or laid it up till times of sickness. After a while they were allowed the eighteen-pence in money, instead of food, with which they were to support themselves.

In this situation they were to remain, as they were told, until they could be removed to their places of labour. It was, however, understood, that they would not be removed during the war between England and Spain, as the harbour was continually blockaded by English vessels.

Those nineteen prisoners who were sentenced to the Castle Bocca Chica (Little Mouth) which is situated at the mouth of the harbour of Carthagena, were taken out and put to labour in the town of Carthagena; their irons were taken off—an iron band put round each of their ankles, with a staple in it, by which two persons were chained together, with a large ox chain about 20 feet long, and weighing 50 or 80 pounds.—They were then put to labour with the common criminal convict slaves of the place. Their labour consisted principally in digging, fetching and carrying, large stones and sand, for the purpose of building fortifications, &c.—this they did upon a handbarrow. After they got their load upon the handbarrow, they place upon it their chains, which would otherwise drag upon the ground,

and proceed to carry it wherever it may be wanted.

When they were let out to labour, being almost naked, the scorching sun was so powerful, as to raise blisters upon the parts exposed to the heat; the middle of the day was almost insupportable, many would faint and fall under the load they were compelled to carry. This, instead of exciting pity, would only bring upon them the lash of the negro slave-driver, who attended them. At first they suffered much for want of hats. These they procured out of the money which was allowed them to live upon. The large straw hats were of great service in screening much of their bodies from the sun. After labouring in this manner for sometime, they became more accustomed to the climate, their skins were soon tanned from white to brown, and the heat became more endurable. They are called up in the morning by their drivers, at daylight, and put to work. At noon and night they are permitted to eat whatever they can procure with their scanty pittance. At night they are locked up in a prison, where they rest till morning. They passed and repassed the prison where their fellow countrymen were confined, but were not permitted to have any access to them. Whenever any one was sick, he was sent to the slaves hospital, where he remained till his health was recovered. In this manner they still continue to wear out their wearied lives.

Soon after their imprisonment, several were attacked with fevers, the flux, black jaundice, and other disorders, that prevail during the sickly season. Their complaints were little attended to by their keepers. No assistance was offered them at first. They were obliged to endure their sickness, lying upon the hard tiles of the prison floor. At length one of the prisoners, by the name of John Burk, died. This excited more attention to their complaints, and shortly afterwards they were indulged with the liberty of going to the hospital whenever they were unwell.

The prisoners seeing no prospect of meliorating their condition, turned their attention to the making of a breach in the wall of the prison. Every convenient moment that could be embraced, with safety, was appropriated to that purpose, not only during the night, but sometimes during the day. The person from whom detection was most to be feared, was the sentinel at the door, and by watching his motions through the grates, they might direct the one at work, in such a manner as to avoid suspicion. During the night, a lamp was kept continually burning in the back part of the prison, for the benefit of the sentinel; and as the prisoners had little else to do in the daytime, except indulge themselves in sleep and rest, it was generally the case that more or less of them were up during the night, walking the floor for exercise and air. This practice was now regularly pursued, that the noise of their irons and the talk, might drown the noise of the hammer. The hole where they were at work, was at the further end of the prison, and about eighty feet from the door, so that no uncommon noise beyond what was constantly made amongst so many prisoners, was required to deceive the ears of the sentinel. The wall through which they expected to pass, was about thirteen feet thick, and was made of stones, bricks and mortar, cemented together. The stones were not of the hardest kind, but generally such as are found along the sea shore, from whence they were brought. After one night's work was over, and just before morning, the pieces of stone, brick and mortar, &c. which came from the hole, were by means of water and lime, which was privately procured, made into a kind of mortar, and replaced into the hole, the outside rubbed over with a little whitewash, and the old hammock hung before it as usual. So that the keeper, when he came into the prison, seeing every thing in its proper place, his suspicion was not excited, nor had he any curiosity to make any particular examinations.

In this manner they continued to pursue their labour, alternately relieving each other, particularly those who made their escape; the principal part of the rest being averse to the attempt, conceiving it hazardous, and that it possibly might involve them in a worse situation. But Mr. Lippincott, Sherman, and Smith, were determined to persevere and take the risk and blame upon themselves. Sometimes the sickness and removal of several of the prisoners to the hospital, would cause a cessation of their progress for awhile; but it was again renewed upon their recovery.

In order to be prepared to rid themselves of their irons, by the time the hole through the walls should be completed, or upon any other favourable occasion, they procured (by certain out-door assistance) several old knives, which by means of a file they made into saws. With these, while some were engaged at the

walls, others were busy sawing upon their bolts which passed through their ankle irons, and connected them together. When they ceased sawing, the saw-cuts, made in the bolts, the filled up with wax, by which means they could scarcely be discovered upon inspection. After several months sawing, occasionally in this manner, they had succeeded in sawing the bolts so far off as to be enabled, with their hands, by bending them backwards and forwards, to break them apart. This, being done they filled the cuts up with wax, and remained in that situation, prepared to throw them off whenever occasion required.

Those who were sick at the hospital, having recovered, returned to their prison, and commenced working at the breach in the wall with all possible diligence. Mr. Lippincott and Mr. Sherman had previously received from a friend certain advances in money, to which they gave him their bills on their friend in America. This money was privately smuggled into their prison. To this they were a great measure indebted for their subsequent success. They were now enabled to obtain many things in prison necessary for carrying on their operations. They procured knives, files, &c. and a sufficiency of provisions, by which they were enabled to recover strength to encounter the intended attempt. Many other advantages they derived from this source which it is not conceived necessary here to enumerate.

They had now, after about seven months diligent labour, though interrupted at intervals, so far finished the hole as to reach the outside of the prison walls. A few minutes would complete it so as to enable them to pass out.

About this time one of the prisoners, Mr. Jeremiah Powell, received a pardon from the king of Spain, and was discharged from his imprisonment.

On or about the 2th of November, 1807, about 11 o'clock at night, after the usual hour of rest, they prepared to take French leave of their old sergeant. They divided the number of prisoners, who were willing to risk the danger, into different companies, for better safety after they were out. Mr. Lippincott and Sherman formed one company by themselves. They then drew lots to ascertain who should first venture out, and the order in which they should proceed. The principal immediate danger to be apprehended was from the sentinels upon the top of the wall who might not happen to be asleep upon their post. The person who drew the first chance to go out, happened to be a prisoner who was unwell, and accordingly declined going. Mr. Lippincott and Mr. Sherman agreed with him to take his chance off his hands. Mr. Sherman having taken off his irons, first went out. Immediately Mr. Lippincott followed, and the rest pursued in their order. No noise was made, and the sentry remained undisturbed. Lippincott and Sherman crept round the walls of the town, until they came to a river, on the other side of which was a small village. After travelling up and down the shore of this river they discovered a canoe hauled up before the door of a Spanish hut. This with great difficulty they dragged into the river, notwithstanding they were molested by dogs, whose noise was near thwarting their attempt. After effecting this, they crossed over, landed near a guard-house, and were near falling into the hands of the guard. Owing to the darkness of the night, however, they avoided them. Here they travelled about in search of a place where they could be concealed for the ensuing day, until being weak and fatigued with the difficulties they had encountered, their strength failed them, and they fell or rather fell down in the street. It was nearly daylight; and they had but a short time to provide for their safety. At length discovering a light, in a small hut at some distance, they approached it, made themselves known to the poor tenants, as prisoners in distress, and immediately offered them two or three pieces of gold. They shook their heads, but upon doubling the sum, they consented to receive, and secrete them for a short time. They remained in this situation until the next night, when they made their escape to another place, where they remained secreted for several weeks, when they made another move, trusting to their friend which they carried in their pockets.

The other sixteen prisoners took a course along the edge of the shore, except Moses Smith, who being somewhat unwell, and unable to proceed, concealed himself in the bushes, where he lay until the second night, during which time the cavalry and other soldiers passed by, and were near falling upon him in pursuit of the prisoners. He crept out, and taking the course that Mr. Lippincott and Sherman had taken, crossed the river, where he again concealed himself until the ensuing night, being two days without