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**A Football of Fate**

**It Was Kicked Into Many Holes**

By F. A. MITCHEL

Bill Somers was probably as much of a football of fate as any man who ever lived. Bill was kicked all over the world. He began as a cabin boy on a ship fitted out for relief of a north pole expedition and spent some time among the Eskimos. Next he was in the heart of Africa trading in ivory. At twenty-five he had made a lot of money and thought he would stay at home and enjoy himself; but, like Sindbad the Sailor, he soon grew tired of quiet and embarked on another voyage.

He bought a vessel and stocked her with cotton goods, such as are used among the common people of eastern countries with warm climates, and started for Asia, intending to exchange them for silks and other goods used in America, but was wrecked in a typhoon off the coast of Ceylon and had nothing left but the dripping clothes in which he was thrown upon the shore.

We next hear of Bill in Peking, China. He didn't seem to do much planning, or, if he did, fate paid no attention to his plans, but kept on kicking him, and he kept on rolling. Like an ordinary ball, he occasionally got into a hole where it looked as if he would remain and rot. But he was always kicked out and recommenced his bounding and rolling both over the land and the sea.

In Peking he found an old, wheezy steamer of about 200 tons burden that had been worn out tramping over the waters, and he concluded to buy her. Where he got the money does not appear, but the probability is that her owner was so anxious to get her off his hands that he was glad to take Bill's note for the amount of the purchase secured on mortgage. The new owner did what he could by way of repair and started down the Peking river for the gulf of Pechili.

What Bill was going to do with his steamer doesn't pertain to this story. It wouldn't be interesting to follow his intentions, because he never succeeded in carrying anything out.

Captain Somers on this voyage down the river and across the gulf had with him an English engineer, Tom Hooper by name, and a heathen Chinese deck hand whose name was so unpronounceable that he was obliged to submit to the conventional English name of Charlie. Charlie, like most Chinamen, seemed very stupid, but also, like his countrymen, was very shy. As for the engineer, he was as obstinate as Englishmen usually are and as hard to kill.

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Tom had been working some time. Bill had gone into the furnace, which had cooled sufficiently to admit him to make an inspection. The Siren was drifting. Suddenly Charlie came running down into the furnace room, with his eyes staring out of his face and his complexion the color of clinders. Bill looked out through the open furnace door.

"Cap'n," gasped Charlie, "plates!"  
"What?"  
"Plates!"  
"Get out of this!" growled Tom. "We're busy."  
Charlie wrung his hands and continued to cry "Plates!"  
"I wonder if he doesn't mean plates," cried Charlie.  
Bill sprang out of the furnace box and followed more slowly by Tom and Charlie, ran up on deck. There, several miles away, was a small craft of a Chinese cut pointing straight for the Siren.

"How do you know she's a pirate?" asked Bill of Charlie.  
Charlie could not speak enough English to make a reply, and even if he could have replied he couldn't have explained what he knew simply by intuition or experience.  
So many holes had Bill been kicked into that he had become accustomed as soon as he rolled into one to set his thinking apparatus to work to discover how to get out. No sooner was he convinced that Charlie was right than he got down below the gunwale to his eyes and told the others to do the same.

"There's no use in their learning how many of us there are, what is our condition or anything else we can help their knowing till they reach us."  
The three men watched the approaching craft, one of them, and one only, Bill, revolving in his brain different plans for escape.  
"There's only one hope for us," he said presently. "If we can hide they may think the boat deserted. What they'll do then nobody knows. We'll have to take what comes. Perhaps, not finding anything of value aboard, they'll go away."  
"Ide!" exclaimed Tom. "Where here we goin' to 'ide?"  
"There's only one place—the furnace. If they don't look in there we're all right. If they do it's all up with us."  
All three, stooping as they went, shuffled down the companionway to the furnace. Charlie pulled open the door and went in first. Tom and Bill stood each waiting for the other. It was not politeness that caused one to defer to the other, but pride. Each wished to be the last to shun the danger.

"Go ahead!" snapped Tom.  
Realizing how hard a Briton is to move, Bill yielded. Tom entered last and pulled the door to behind him.  
"You lunatic!" exclaimed Bill. "What did you do that for? We're penned in. We can't open the door from the inside."  
"But if we'd left the door unlatched they'd have got us," replied Tom.  
There was no use arguing the point. If they were not discovered by the pirates they might possibly be boarded by some one who would release them. It was not long before they heard a babel of voices on deck and knew the Siren was being searched for loot.

After exploring the upper part of the best the Siren down into the engine room. Only Charlie understood what they said, and the others dared not ask him. When the boarders had discussed the matter of finding the Siren deserted they all ran upstairs together.  
After a while a sound was heard that destroyed hope—the sound of a siren boring. The pirates were scuttling the ship.  
Whoever was doing the job was some time about it. Gradually the sounds above ceased, and it was evident that most of the pirates had gone, leaving the man below to finish the scuttling. All became still except the sound of the boring.  
"Charlie!" said Bill.  
"You hawl out that one of your heathen gods is id here and if the bloke doesn't light out he'll be struck dead."

Charlie did as required. The man addressed, as soon as he heard a voice coming from the bowels of the ship, ran upstairs. There he talked excitedly with another man, and the two came part way down to the furnace room and listened. Bill ordered Charlie to repeat what he had said, and Charlie told the listeners that he was the most ferocious of the Chinese gods and if they didn't let him out he would visit them and theirs with fire and sword even to the ninth generation. This produced the effect desired, and the door was opened. Bill sprang out and seized one of the Chinamen, while Tom followed the other nearly to the deck. Both were secured and bound.

The danger now was that the pirates would get tired waiting for the men they had left for the scuttling and return. The siren had been left in the hole it had been making, and there was nothing to fear from that. Bill went up the companionway, keeping out of sight, to reconnoiter. The first thing he saw was a boat the pirates had left for the men who were to scuttle the liner, the second was the pirate craft moving away under full sail, and the third was a Chinese government police boat chasing her.  
Bill shouted the good news to Tom and Charlie, who came running up the companionway to see for themselves. Their narrow escape from drowning locked in the furnace room was turned to exhilaration at watching the police boat chase the pirates. The former having nothing but sails to propel her and the latter having steam, the chase was a short one. The police quickly overhauled the outlaws, and as soon as this was done the men on the Siren got out a tattered United States flag and hoisted it, union down, as a signal of distress, whereupon the police boat came up alongside.

The two pirates aboard the Siren were put on the police boat, and the disabled boat was taken in tow. Then all started for Peking. Reaching that city, the outlaws were turned over to the proper authorities, and on the day of their execution the three men who had been locked up in the furnace room went to see the job done.  
Somers in narrating the adventure says that it was the worst hole fate ever kicked him into, and he doesn't see how there can be a worse one. When he started from Peking again he had found an opportunity to sell the Siren for a profit, and after paying the price agreed on to the astonished mortgagee he went on rolling down into British territory, where he invested his equity and, striking a good thing, instead of rolling farther, accumulated a small fortune.

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