

BECKE LOUIS

CONCERNING

"BULLY"

HAYES

Louis Becke

Concerning "Bully" Hayes

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Louis Becke

Concerning «Bully» Hayes / From «The Strange Adventure Of James Shervinton and Other / Stories» – 1902

I

"BULLY" HAYES! Oh, halcyon days of the sixties and seventies, when the Pacific was not, as now, patrolled by men-of-war from lonely Pylstaart, in the Friendlies, to the low-lying far-away Marshalls and the coral lagoons of the north-west; when the Queensland schooners ran full "nigger" cargoes to Bundaberg, Maryborough, and Port Mackay; when the Government agents, drunk nine days out of ten, did as much recruiting as the recruiters themselves, and drew—even as they may draw to-day—thumping bonuses from the planters *sub rosa!* In those days the nigger-catching fleet from the Hawaiian Islands cruised right away south to palm-clad Arorai, in the Line Islands, and ran the Queensland ships close in the business. They came down from Honolulu in ballast-trim, save for the liquor and firearms, and went back full of a sweating mass of black-haired, copper-coloured Line Islanders, driven below at dark to take their chance of being smothered if it came on to blow. Better for them had it so happened, as befel the *Tahiti* a few years ago when four hundred of these poor people went to the bottom on their way to slavery in San José de Guatemala.

Merry times, indeed, had those who ran the labour vessels then in the trade, when Queensland rivalled the Hawaiian Islands in the exciting business of "black-birding," and when Captain William Henry Hayes, of Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A.—vulgarly called "Bully" Hayes—came twice a year to fair Samoa with full cargoes of oil, copra, and brown-skinned kanakas, all obtained on the stalwart captain's peculiar time-payment system.

One hardly ever hears the name of the redoubtable Bully mentioned nowadays, yet it is scarcely thirty years ago since his name was a power all over the wide Pacific, from Manila to Valparaiso. In those days did a German trading-vessel in the Islands sight a white-painted brig with yacht-like lines and carrying Cunningham's patent topsails, the Teutonic skipper cracked on all his ship could stagger under, and thanked heaven when he saw the stranger hull-down; for Bully, with his *fidus achates*, the almost equally notorious Captain Ben Peese, had a penchant for boarding Dutchmen and asking for a look at their chronometers, and in his absent-minded way, taking these latter away with him.

And in Sydney, and Melbourne especially, people will remember the gay, dashing, black-whiskered Yankee captain who, in the sixties, came to these ports in a flash clipper ship, where he spent his money royally, flirting—alas! if he had but stopped at that—with every accessible woman of high or low degree—provided she was fair to look upon—and playing the devil generally in every known and unknown manner, and who then sailed gaily away to China, neglecting to attend to many little financial matters in connection with the refitting of his ship, and leaving the affections of a number of disconsolate beauties in a very bad state of repair.

The writer happened to know the gentleman well, and although it is now sixteen years since his body was thrown to the sharks among the lagoons of the Marshall Group, it is not too late to rescue his memory from much undeserved obloquy. Many a fancifully embroidered tale has been told and printed of the terrible "massacres" he perpetrated among the inhabitants of the South Seas. These massacres were purely apocryphal and only worthy of appearing—as they did in the first place—in an unreliable daily paper in San Francisco.

A man's true character is generally revealed by sudden misfortune. The writer sailed with Hayes for nearly two years, and was with him when, perhaps, the heaviest stroke of ill-luck he ever experienced befell him. In March of 1874 his brig *Leonora* ground herself to death on the jagged coral of Strong's Island, in the Caroline Group, and "Bully" seemed for the nonce a broken man. But few people knew that beneath that gay, laughing, devil-may-care exterior there lay a whole world of dauntless courage and iron resolution; that six months after the brig was destroyed he would, by unwearying toil and the wonderful fascination he exercised over his fierce and ruffianly crew, find himself a wealthier man than when he trod his brig's deck with a full cargo of oil beneath his feet and ten thousand dollars in his cabin.

Let me first of all, though, before relating all that befell us during our sojourn on Strong's Island, where I, at least, spent many long, happy months, speak of the *Leonora*, once the *Waterlily*, and *alias* the *Luna*, the *Leonie*, and the *Racinga*. As the *Waterlily* she was first known, and under that name sailed her maiden voyage in the opium-trade, and beat the record. At this time Hayes made his appearance at one of the Treaty Ports in a ship named the *Old Dominion*. On the way out from New York his crew had mutinied, headed by the steward, a Greek. In the fight that ensued Hayes killed the Greek outright by a blow of his fist, and threw another with such violence against a deck-house that he died in a few hours. An inquiry was held, and Hayes, so it was stated, came out of it well. The *Old Dominion* was sold, and Hayes entered the Imperial Chinese service as commander of a gunboat. Another gunboat was commanded by one Ben Peese. Of this period of his life Hayes never cared to speak, but the story of Peese and himself was given as follows:—

The two became friends, and in conjunction with some mandarins of high rank, levied a system of blackmail upon the Chinese coasting junks that brought them—*not* the junks—in money very rapidly, and Hayes's daring attack on and capture of a nest of other and real pirates procured for him a good standing with the Chinese authorities. Peese soon got into trouble, however, and when a number of merchants who had been despoiled had succeeded in proving that his gunboat was a worse terror to them than the pirates whom he worried, he disappeared for a time. The *Waterlily*, which was then on the point of sailing for Calcutta, was, at this time, chartered at a big figure by some rich merchants to take a cargo of provisions to Rangoon. Shortly after her departure Hayes resigned and went to Macao. Here he was joined by his colleague, in command of the *Waterlily*. How Peese had got possession of her was not known. Hayes told people that his friend had bought her, but those intimate with Peese knew a great deal better. Anyhow, some months later, the merchants who chartered her said that Peese, who had been given command after his forced resignation from the Imperial service, had landed them somewhere in the Straits, taken all their dollars, sold the cargo to the Dutch military authorities, and cleared out.

And then with a new ship, a new crew—many of whom were Hayes's and Peese's former Chinese naval service pirates—the partners sailed for the Bonin Islands, where Peese was well known, and had lived before. Two days ere making the Bonins a ship was sighted ashore on a reef. It was a gunboat from Macao with an official on board, bound to the Bonin Islands to investigate the murder of a Portuguese captain and mate. A boat was lowered from the *Waterlily*, and Peese, who spoke Spanish well, learned from the captain that the gunboat, which was then hard and fast, had run ashore in the night and bumped a big hole in herself just amidships. For a thousand dollars Peese agreed to stand by them and save all he could, including her four guns. The guns were rafted to the *Waterlily*, then the small arms and stores followed in the boats belonging to the gunboat. At dusk Hayes went aboard the wrecked ship and took the brig's Chinese carpenter with him. On examination he said the ship could be got off again if she could be canted over and a sail "fothered" over the hole temporarily. This the gunboat captain agreed to try, and signalled for his boats to return from the *Waterlily*. After working all night the thing was done, and the captain and officers were profuse in their expression of admiration at Hayes's skill. As the tide fell the carpenters got to work, and the gunboat was made watertight. Under Hayes's direction, at flood-tide, she was then kedged over the reef into the lagoon,

and anchored in smooth water. Peese and Hayes then arranged to bring in the *Waterlily* at next tide, lay her alongside the gunboat, and put the guns and stores aboard again, agreeing to take the captain's order on Macao for 700 dollars and 800 dollars in cash. But next morning the brig was nowhere to be seen, and although the captain had his ship he was minus his big guns, many small arms, and stores to the value of 2,000 or 8,000 dollars. In attempting to get under way he again ran ashore, and remained hard and fast for a week.

Meanwhile Hayes and Peese had gone off on a southerly course to the Pelew Group where the cannons were sold to the chiefs, and the two captains gave a feast, and made merry generally, and got rid of nearly all their crew, taking Pelew men and seven Japanese in their places.

For a week or so all went well, and then Hayes and Peese fell out—over a woman, of course. Peese had bought a very beautiful girl from one of the chiefs for 250 dollars, which sum, he told Hayes privately, he did not intend to pay. Hayes insisted on his comrade either paying the sum agreed on or giving her up. Peese, declaring he would do as he liked, drew his pistol and ordered the girl into the boat. Hayes tore the weapon from him, and seizing the girl with one hand, pointed the pistol at Peese and told him to go on board. Peese was no coward, but he knew his man, and sulkily retired. With all Hayes's wickedness he was not entirely heartless. He asked the girl to tell him if she was afraid of Peese. She said "No!" and then Bully quietly told her to follow his fellow-captain aboard. But Peese never forgave him, and from that day the two mutually distrusted each other.

After cruising about the Western Carolines for two or three months, and in some mysterious way filling up the brig, now named the *Leonora*, with a cargo of coco-nut oil, and getting a ton of hawk-bill turtle-shell, worth 6 dollars a pound, the two worthies appeared in Apia Harbour, Samoa. Here they sold the cargo and obtained a commission from the firm of Johann Caesar Godeffroy and Sons, of Hamburg—a firm that in Polynesia rivalled, in a small way, old John Company—to procure for them two hundred or three hundred Line Island labourers at 100 dollars per head.

In those days the most respected storekeeper in Apia was a retired mariner—a Captain Turnbull—a stout old man, slow of speech, and profoundly, but not obtrusively, religious. People used to wonder how it was that "Misi Pulu," the shrewdest business man in the group, would supply Hayes with 1,000 or 2,000 dollars' worth of trade, and merely take his I O U, while refusing to give credit to any other soul. Spoken to on the matter, the gruff old man replied, "That's my business, but I'll tell you why I trust a man like Hayes and won't trust any one here. I know the man, and I've told him what none of you would dare to tell him, that I looked upon his course of life with horror. He laughed at me and said, with a dreadful oath, that if ever he could do me a 'good turn' he would. That pleased me, and when he came to me a week afterwards and said that he wanted new canvas and running gear, but the Dutchmen wouldn't sell him any on credit, I said I would—and did, and he paid me, and I'll give him a few thousand dollars' credit any day."

Bully and Peese sailed for the Ellice and Gilbert groups, and soon news reached Sydney that they had been playing havoc with the traders there. With the traders of Captain Eury, and those of Captain Daly, of the Sydney brig *Lady Alicia*, they were very rough, appropriating all their oil and other native produce and giving them sarcastically written receipts. Hayes stated that this was in retaliation for Daly having visited his (Hayes's) stations in some of the Kingsmill Islands, and having been too friendly with some of the local fair.

When the brig returned to Samoa, Hayes alone was in command; the voluble, bearded Peese had, he said, sold him his interest in the ship and gone to China again. People talked and said that Hayes had killed him, but as the strength of the big captain's right arm was well known in Samoa, nobody talked too loud. It was on this occasion that Hayes "had" the German firm for some thousands of dollars. It seems that in returning through the Kingsmill and Gilbert Groups he found a number of the German firm's traders in terror of their lives, the natives having warned them to clear out or be killed, they would have no white men on their islands. Hayes consented to give them all passages to Samoa—for a consideration, of course, and they agreed on behalf of their firm to pay him each

50 dollars passage money—a reasonable enough sum. Most of them had large quantities of oil and copra—this also was shipped. After the last island had been visited, Hayes called them together in the cabin and addressed them: "Now, boys, I've promised to give you all passages to Samoa, and I will—if you do what I want. Now you've all got money belonging to the German firm. Well, each of you must give me 50 dollars, and if you take my advice you'll stick to the remainder. One thing you all know as well as I do, and that is, that the Dutchmen will take your souls out of their cases if you owe them anything. As for the oil and copra *I'll* see to that. That's all I've got to say, and if any of you won't agree to this let him come on deck and try and convince me." The traders grinned and consented to take the offer of a passage and the privilege of annexing the firm's dollars, and each paid his 50 dollars. When Hayes got to Samoa, Weber, the German manager, interviewed Bully, who detailed the dangers the traders had escaped, and genially said, "I hardly like to make you pay for your traders' passages, but as I have such a heavy cargo for you, you won't object to pay me a trifle—say 50 dollars each. They've all got money for you as well as oil and copra." Weber paid, Hayes giving an acknowledgment. Then Weber sent his cargo-boats to unload the brig. He was rather surprised when Hayes sent him a note:—

Brig *Leonora*, Apia. "Dear Sir,—You have forgotten that you have not yet made any arrangements with me about the freight of your oil and copra. I now demand freight on 200,000 lbs. copra at 1 cent per lb., 2,000 dollars; for the oil, a lump sum of 600 dollars; in all, 2,500 dollars. Unless the freight is paid at once, and delivery taken forthwith, I will proceed to New Zealand and sell to recoup myself.—W. H. Hayes."

The German firm was furious at this trick, but knowing what Hayes was and fearing to lose everything, they paid and took delivery, and Hayes, as he paid over, told Weber that he would always have a good opinion of him in future for his prompt manner in settling up. Weber gasped, but said nothing.

Just about this time the American corvette *Narrangansett* steamed into Apia Harbour. It had been rumoured around Polynesia for some time previously that certain charges had been made against Bully by American citizens. What the exact nature of these charges were has never been known. Anyhow, the captain of the corvette heard that Hayes was at anchor in Apia, and came down full speed from Pago Pago in Tutuila. Captain Edward Hamilton was then pilot, and brought the *Narrangansett* in. The moment the anchor was down, an armed boat's crew dashed aboard the *Leonora* and took possession. The officer in command had a surprise in store for him, when, entering the brig's cabin, he saw seated at the table not the truculent, piratical ruffian he expected to see, but a quiet, stout man of herculean proportions, who bowed politely and said, "Welcome on board the *Leonora*, sir. Have you come to seize my ship and myself? Well now, don't apologise, but sit down a while until my steward brings you a glass of wine, and then I'll go and see what all this is about." This officer afterwards told Hamilton that he was so struck with Bully's cool effrontery, and his equally genial smile, that he did sit down and take a drink, and then Hayes accompanied him to the corvette. As the boat ran alongside, the officers and bluejackets not on duty thronged the side to see the famous pirate, who walked calmly to the quarter-deck, and, singling out the captain (Maude, I believe, was his name), said, "How do you do, sir? I am happy to see my country's flag again in these seas; but what the hell do you mean, sir, by putting an armed crew on my deck? By God, sir, if you don't give me good reasons I'll make you repent it." The corvette captain stood quite unmoved, although there was a suppressed titter heard amongst his officers.

"I pardon you your offensive language, Captain Hayes, as I daresay you feel excited. If you will come below I will show you good authority for my action. I have orders to arrest you and investigate serious charges against you. I trust, however, that you will be able to clear yourself."

The quiet, gentlemanly manner of the naval officer acted like a charm upon Hayes. The fierce glitter in his bright blue eyes died out, and bowing to the corvette captain he turned to the group of officers, and in a bluff sincere manner, said: "Gentlemen, I apologise to your captain and to you for

my insulting manner. I see that I have acted in an unbecoming way; but I am a hasty man, yet quick to make amends when I am in the wrong."

The officers returned his salute, and then Bully went below and listened with an unmoved face to the warrant for his arrest. He was allowed to write a letter to the shore, and given the liberty of the ship whilst the captain of the *Narrangesett* was preparing for the trial. A notification was sent to the three Consuls of his seizure, and asking them to attend and verify the charges made to them by various persons against Hayes. None but the German Consul responded, and his witnesses (traders whose stations had been cleaned out by Hayes) utterly broke down. One look at those steady, steel-blue eyes was enough for them. They knew what was in store for them if any of them ever crossed Bully's path again, and slunk away to their German protectors. After two hours' investigation, the captain broke up the court, and formally told those present that he would announce his decision in writing.

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