

SKETCH OF A BUCCANEER

By WESTON MARTYR

I AM able to report that the breed of buccaneers is not extinct yet. I have just met one. A fine sample. According to the feeble definition of the species given in my dictionary, a buccaneer is a fellow who cuts up wild oxen into strips and smokes them. But I think that all nonsense. My definition of a buccaneer is a bold bad man who sails off to the Spanish Main, tears things up there by the roots, paints the place red, cuts a lot of throats and comes sailing home again with his ship ballasted with gold. That is my idea of a proper buccaneer; and the Commodore filled the bill completely.

I met him at a Yacht Club dinner, of all odd places. I had never heard of him or his yacht club, but it is part of my job to observe unusual characters, and the Commodore's letter of invitation drew me all across the breadth of England. He wrote from a northeast coal port of unholy reputation, and he said:

"I want you to come and talk to us at our annual dinner. You don't know me, but I know about you. You've sailed and raced against the Americans, but what's more to the point, you've sailed and raced with them; so I want you to tell us the reason why we always fail to collect the America's Cup. Because I'm thinking of building a boat myself next year and challenging for it. And I mean to collect it. Don't say you won't come. This is a hole and it's a long journey, but I'll provide a plane for you, both ways, and I'd propose to put you up for the week end. My place is Valleysea Court, which you've possibly heard of. I've found out you are interested in archaeology, are a judge of port, and keen on archery. Valleysea is worth looking at. The chapel is mostly Saxon work; the big hall's Norman, with medieval and early Tudor trimmings, and the Elizabethans built the rest of the place; since when no one's touched it, bar me, and I've confined my efforts to faithful restorations only. Then the cellars will interest you. I've got some Coekburn's 1851 down there, which was the finest wine in the world once, but it's too old now, so we'll drink Sandeman's '81. Also I'm getting some targets set up beside the house where it's sheltered from most winds, and I've asked the two best archers in the North of England to play with you. You must come."

I went. As soon as I saw the Commodore, I knew he was going to be worth the trouble. He was a little old man, quiet and neat, but his eyes and his nose made me think of a peregrine falcon. Especially his eyes. Have you noticed a falcon's eyes? They look straight at you, but through you, at something very far off.

The Commodore's greeting was unusual. He did not say it was awfully good of me to have come all that way to address his club, nor did he embarrass his guest with the customary nonsense about his visit being an honor. He said, "I'm glad you've come. They all said we'd never get you. But I relied on my flair for tactful and judicious bribery. Was it the old house, or the old wine, or the archers, that did the business?"

It seemed wise, when dealing with a man of the Commodore's caliber, to meet him on his own ground with his own weapons, and talk straight. I said, "I'll admit your bribes shook me, but my own curiosity and vanity really did the trick. I wanted to meet the writer of your letter, and I dearly love being regarded as an expert and hearing myself making a speech."

I am glad I told the truth; it changed the Commodore's eyes. He ceased to look through me for something; he appeared to have found what he was looking for. He chuckled. As he led me in to dinner, he said, "*Gott strafe* all humbugs, what?"

It was a good dinner and, afterward, I made a good speech. I thought it was a good speech, anyhow, and I think the Commodore did too. The members of that yacht club desired to know why the America's Cup persists in remaining in America. I

told them. I think I know the reason, and I let myself go. We English pride ourselves on playing fair. If we are beaten by anybody at anything, we are sure such an extraordinary result can be due only to chicanery. We have a sensible habit of merely playing at games, but our propensity to regard an international contest as a mere game seems foolish to me and is, definitely, fatal. In these affairs, you must take off the gloves and mix it. That was my theme, and my audience did not like it. But the Commodore said, "Good. That's the stuff. Reality. But these chaps can't face it and they won't like you." I fear he was right.

The Commodore rescued me from his irate members and drove me to his home. I had heard about Valleysea Court, of course; everyone who is interested in archaeology and English history has heard about it. But not many have been lucky enough to see the inside. As the Commodore said, "It may be a place of historical interest and all that, but it's my home. I have to live in it. And I'm interested in archaeology, but not in archaeologists; they're invariably damned bores."

When the Commodore said that, I was gazing at the ceiling of his library. I was about to remark that the beam ends and panels had been carved and painted by Elizabethans who knew their job and



"I Got Myself in Position to Get What I Wanted, and I Got It. I Got Absolute Privacy"

ILLUSTRATED BY
H. J. MOWAT



"That Stopped Their Game—All Except One Fellow, Name of Ahearn. He Persisted in Talking About His Rights, Climbing My Walls and Walking About My Property"

the convention, but I took his hint just in time, and kept my mouth shut. It is the Commodore's remark, too, which now helps this amateur archaeologist to resist the urge to tell you all about that house. Not everybody is an archaeologist, and this is supposed to be a story about the Commodore and not about his house. But, just to show that the study of old buildings is not so dull as it sounds, there is one thing I will say. There is one room in the Commodore's house which is, thank God, now unused and unfurnished. It is a dull, uninteresting room to the inexpert eye. There is a half-inch space between the edges of all the broad oak floor boards, and a stick poked down the cracks reveals the fact that the space between the floor and the ceiling below is half filled with fine sand. This was a labor-saving arrangement common to all well-appointed torture chambers; it saved mopping up the blood.

But I did not see that chamber until next morning. I should not have slept very well if I had. I did not sleep that night, in any case. The Commodore saw to that. He generated so much energy that I think he regarded sleep as a waste of time, so we sat in his library and talked till the day dawned.

The Commodore did all the talking; I merely egged him on. Sleep may be golden, but the Commodore's tongue was silver and his words pearls.

He began by telling me of his designs on the America's Cup. His designs are nefarious but private; so all I can say is that if they mature, there is going to be panic in the New York Yacht Club and another big depression in the United States.

And I think the Commodore's plans will mature, because, I gathered, he requires some relatively cheap but world-wide publicity in connection with another of his little schemes.

When the Commodore finished explaining his outrageous plans, I said—I have already admitted to egging him on—"Good. But there's only one thing certain. It's going to cost you a fortune, win or lose. And what I want to know is how you manage to make enough money to be able to risk losing a fortune. I don't ask as a businessman who wants to make a fortune, but as a man whose business it is to write about how other men do things."

Said the Commodore, "Yes. I understand. Well, it's a game, really. The first few thousands are hard work and luck, but after that it's simple. You make up your mind what you want and maneuver yourself into the strongest possible position to get it, and then you go for it, all out, letting nothing stop you. I said 'nothing.'"

I said, "Thanks. That's the principle, but what I'd like is to see it working. Can't you give me an illustration?"

"Yes," answered the Commodore, without a moment's hesitation. "Take this place. I bought it to live in and I wanted privacy. When I found the villagers walking all over my land, I put up barbed-wire fences. They cut my wire and talked about their rights of way. I built stone walls and they made gaps in 'em. I concreted the walls, and anyone who wanted to exercise his right of way had to exercise himself over several eight-foot climbs with broken

glass on top. That stopped their game—all except one fellow, name of Ahearn. He persisted in talking about his rights, climbing my walls and walking about my property. My keepers laid for him, but he laid 'em out. He didn't prosecute. Nor did I. I was advised he had all the law of England on his side. So I bought the cottage he lived in and turned him out—him and his wife and children and his old mother. Yes. . . . Don't interrupt. His mother wasn't bedridden. I wish she had been. It would have lent emphasis to the example I wished to make of Ahearn. There's a chronic housing shortage in this village. I knew that, of course, or I wouldn't have bought Ahearn's cottage."

"You're a hard man, Commodore," I said.

"You're asking how I make my money," the Commodore answered, "and I'm telling you, without reservations. The villagers managed to bed the Ahearns down between 'em somehow, and next Sunday I met the whole family, gran'ma and all, promenading through my front paddock. Ahearn was carrying a ladder. I didn't say anything. I found out where he worked—it was a tinsmithy in the port—and I bought it up and fired Ahearn."

The Commodore flicked the butt of his cigar into the fire. "This part of the world is scheduled as a distressed area," he continued. "Over seventy per cent of the men are unemployed. So Ahearn stayed unemployed too. He turned up here three months later. He didn't use the footpaths this time; he came

up the front drive. I don't know what he said to my butler, but I saw he was scared when he told me Ahearn was at the door. I told him to show the man in here. I've never seen a paler face than Ahearn's. I'd driven him to desperation, all right. I shooed Higson out—I had to tell him twice—and told him to take my great Dane out with him. I said, 'You didn't use the right of way this time, Ahearn.' And he said, 'No. I used the front drive and I came to the front door. You've beat me.' I said it was a pity he hadn't seen that sooner, and told him I was sacking my head keeper, because I couldn't trust him to keep trespassers off my property. I said I thought Ahearn was the man for that job. The wages were more than they paid at the tin works, and just about three months ago I'd bought a cottage for the sort of head keeper I needed."

It was three o'clock in the morning, but the Commodore lit a fresh seven-inch cigar. "So, you see," said he, presently, "I got myself in position to get what I wanted, and I got it. I got absolute privacy. As by-products, I've got a keeper I can trust and a little tin works that's paid me twenty per cent dividends since I reorganized it. So everyone's happy. D'you see how it's done?"

I said I saw, but that I did not admire an end gained by oppression, particularly the oppression of women and children.

The Commodore got out of his chair and stretched himself full length upon (Continued on Page 46)

Life Begins At 40

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Gus Insel
Gets Better Paid Job

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I am now 42—one of the managers of a restaurant!

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a sofa. "I'm always ready to do evil if I can make good," said he. "Take that how you like, but take the Molivenian coal contract for an example. The Molivenian Government runs the railways and they buy four hundred thousand tons of coal a year. I tried to get my hooks into that business for a long time. It was a matter of giving big bribes and long credit. The credit was the difficulty. Last year I had another shot at it. I sent out a good man, old T. J. Morgan, with orders to bribe the boss Molivenianos with a private rebate of fifteen per cent. I judged that would do, because ten per cent is more usual.

"T. J. soon got to work and he cabled to say he'd got the government in his pocket and that the contract was as good as ours, but advising me not to touch it with a barge pole, because the Molivenian Government refused to do business on any basis but a twelve months' credit. Now, I wouldn't trust anybody, especially anybody in Molivenia, with half a million pounds for a year—not with half a million of my money, anyhow. But I knew the British Government was keen on encouraging exports, especially coal exports from the distressed areas, and I thought I might be able to wangle something out of them if I tried hard enough. So I wired T. J. to mark time.

"I've got a long nose, as you can see, and I poked it into the inner workings of our government export-credit scheme. And it wasn't long before I smelled something. I smelled a rat. It was only a little one, and it might even prove to be a mouse, so I was puzzled how to make use of it.

"It's funny, the little things that can stimulate one. I'd spent the morning trying hard to think how to dig a credit of half a million out of the British Government, and I hadn't thought of anything and was feeling discouraged. I went to Aldridge's for lunch and ordered a chop. When the chop came, I didn't fancy it, so I told them to take it away and bring me something else. When I got my bill, I saw they'd charged me for the chop, and I kicked. They said I must pay for what I'd ordered, and I said I never paid for anything I hadn't used. There was a fuss. I refused to be swindled and—well, you know Aldridge's—very swanky and high-and-mighty. And all the other expensive lunchers looking down their noses at this nasty old man kicking up a row over nothing. So I told 'em to keep the chop hot, and I went out and found a ragged old chap picking up cigarette ends. I said, 'Could you eat a chop?' and he said, 'Could I eat a chop! Blime, mister, I'm starving!'

"I took him into Aldridge's. He jibbed at the entrance, but I took him by the arm, and repelling all boarders and hall porters and headwaiters and such, I sat the old chap down at my table and told 'em to bring on that chop. They protested, of course, including Aldridge himself and most of the other lunchers. But I insisted. I pointed out that Aldridge's was just a public eating house, in spite of its swank, and if anybody ordered food and could pay for it, they'd got to serve him, even if he did smell. So I won, and I was so pleased with myself that I felt I could tackle anything, and I went out there and then, and tackled the Export Bureau and stung it for four hundred thousand pounds. . . .

"Yes, I did. Don't you interrupt. It was easy. I started by demanding half a million, and they nearly fell down dead. I said it wasn't a gift I wanted, nor even a loan of hard cash. All I needed was a year's credit for a sound piece of business which would greatly benefit a distressed industry in a very distressed area. I said, if they refused to finance the scheme, they would be depriving the British coal and shipping industries of the Lord knows how much in wages and freights and profits and what not, and that if they persisted in perpetrating such a heartless crime, I would make it my job to see the newspapers heard all about it. I asked them what their department was there for, anyway—to stimulate exports or murder them? And if they thought they could murder the export of four hundred thousand tons of Northumberland and Durham coal and get away with it, they were making a mistake, because every Member of Parliament on the northeast coast would rise up in the House and demand their blood. And they'd get it.

"That shook 'em. I thought the moment ripe to introduce, tentatively, that little mouse I'd got up me sleeve. It turned out to be a rat, all right, and a fine, big smelly one. I'd found out they'd granted a credit of eighty thousand pounds to that old rogue, Walter Hobarry. I knew him for a damned old crook—that's what put me on the scent. I didn't know what this particular ramp was, but I was sure it was a ramp if Hobarry was in it. So I broached the subject of that eighty thousand pounds. I said I knew all; which is a good thing to say if you know nothing. I said a government department which granted Sir Walter Hobarry eighty thousand pounds to finance a scheme which would, inevitably, be found to benefit nobody but Sir Walter Hobarry, and a department which then refused to finance my scheme for benefiting the British coal-export trade—well, that department was certainly due to have a lot of awkward questions asked about itself, and if they thought this was going to be the end of it, they could call me Kelly.

"That did the trick. They were scared. I don't know what mess old Hobarry had landed 'em into, but I could see it was something nasty. And don't misunderstand me. Our Civil Service isn't corrupt, but it's very apt to be stupid. And if you're stupid enough to play with Sir Walter, you're sure to get rolled in the dirt.

"So I got four hundred thousand pounds. I took a chance on the extra hundred thousand pounds and cabled T. J. to close the deal. Then the trouble started. When the local gang of Molivenian grafters found the coal contract had gone to us instead of, as usual, to them, they started to kick. They used both feet. They bought up every newspaper in Molivenia for a month, and started a campaign accusing the government of corruption and T. J. of bribery. It stirred up such a fuss T. J. got the wind up and cabled to say it might mean a change of government, and where would we be then?

"That prospect was serious, as I'd shipped a hundred thousand tons of coal by then, and I cabled T. J. to buy up the papers himself for the following month and turn on some counter propaganda. So he did. But the other gang

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had got too big a start, and one morning T. J. woke up to sounds of battle in the street, and when he looked out, someone took a shot at him, and he realized that a revolution had started and was going full blast.

"T. J. is a Cardiff businessman and he hadn't used to seeing dead men scattered about the place. He didn't like it. He told me so himself. He said he grabbed a telephone and rang up the boss grafter. Says T. J., 'This is the right time for quick plain speaking. You're in politics for what you can get out of it, and I'm in the coal trade for the same reason. What we both want is profits, and we've worked for 'em, but I'll admit I didn't bargain on working up a civil war. So I'm ready to haggle. I'll agree to leave you a free hand and no competition over next year's coal contract if you'll call off your bravoos and stop killing people in front of my hotel.' And the other chap said that as they weren't his men, he couldn't call 'em off. Then he called T. J. and himself a couple of fools for not realizing that, between the two of them, they'd raised such a fuss in the country over the state of corruption in the government, that a new party—the Party of Purity and Progress, they called themselves—had been formed, and they'd started a revolution with the slogan 'Death and Corruption to Molivenia's Corrupters'; so he said that he proposed to catch the next mail boat for New York, and advised T. J. to join him, and T. J. did.

"By the time T. J. got home and told me all that, the Party of Purity and Progress had won their revolution and taken over the government of Molivenia. And one of the first things the new government did was to repudiate my coal contract. The dirty dogs. I'd delivered three hundred thousand tons by that time, and I could see I'd have to take steps or I'd never get paid for it.

"I used to think the best way to get action was to tackle the man at the top, but that was before I'd tackled the man at the top of our Foreign Office, Mr. blooming Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. It took me five weeks to wangle an interview which lasted less than two minutes. I got politely spat at and metaphorically kicked downstairs. Which annoyed me. I told old Dan Higgins all about it, and he laughed at me. Dan is our local M. P. He said I ought to know a government department wasn't like a business office. If you wanted results, you had to make sure the head of the department would never hear a whisper about your business, and you then got to work on the undersecretaries, who were the lads who got things done.

"He promised to fix things up for me, and four days later I found myself drinking tea on the Terrace of the House with two undersecretaries. At least, Higgins said they were undersecretaries, but I hardly took 'em seriously, because they looked like a couple of babes to me; their mothers' milk

hadn't dried yet on their little mustaches. When I'd told 'em my story, the child from the Foreign Office burst out laughing. He said they'd never understood what really caused the last revolution in Molivenia, so he was glad to find out it was me. Says he, 'Fomenting revolutions must be great fun, and I do hope you enjoyed yourself, because your little fomentation looks like costing you four hundred thousand pounds.'

"I said, 'No. Not me. You've got it wrong. It's going to cost the government four hundred thousand pounds.'

"The other child was a Treasury boy. He'd been looking very bored up to date, but when I said that, he perked up. Says he, 'Oh! When did you dip your fingers into our pocket?'

"I said, 'The whole business was financed by the Export Bureau, sonny.'

"Don't try to tell me they financed the Molivenian Government,' says he. 'They've got enough sense for that. They financed you, and you're the man they'll come down on for payment, granddaddy.'

"I said, 'Then they'll come in vain. They may think they financed me, but what they did finance was the T. J. Morgan Export Company, Limited. I said, "Limited." It's a company I formed to take care of this Molivenian business. And it's all the business they've got. And, if the Molivenianos don't pay up, it won't do you much good coming down on the Morgan Export Company for repayment of your loan, because the company will be bust.'

he wants to touch his three million pounds, we'll have to touch our four hundred thousand first.'

"I said, 'Four hundred thousand, plus five per cent interest.' And little Eustace said, 'Trust me. Plus ten per cent interest and expenses, of course.' So I got my money. And I made even more profit than I'd thought. I knew I was bound to, when I got myself in a position to make the government work for me. As I told you before, it's getting yourself in the right position that does the trick. D'you see?'

I said, "I do see. And it's very interesting. But how many men, women and kids were killed in that revolution you started?'

"Don't know," the Commodore answered. "But I do know that revolution was the best thing that ever happened to Molivenia. It put into power a comparatively honest government for the first time in the history of the country. If you debit me with a revolution, you must credit me with that. If the Molivenianos have any gratitude, they'll put up a statue of me. Or they might give me a monopoly to supply their coal." Here the Commodore sat up suddenly. "By gum!" said he. "That's the germ of a notion. There might be something in that."

I got up. "If we don't look out, the sun will be up before we get to bed."

The Commodore pulled aside a curtain. "It is up," he said. "But bed be damned. We'll have a bath and some coffee, and I'll play you nine holes before breakfast."

I said nothing on earth could induce me to do anything so dreadful and that I intended to go to sleep. The Commodore said that was nonsense. He insisted. He pressed me so hard that at last I had to be blunt with him. I said, "It's no good, Commodore. I'm going to bed, and nothing you can say will prevent me. I said, 'nothing.' You like to get your own way, and you always do get it, and I think it's bad for you. So I'm going to do you a good turn and thwart your wicked schemes for once. I am going to my bed. I will show you your ruthless methods won't work with me. You're used to browbeating men of affairs but you can't rush me, because I'm a kind of man you don't understand, and you don't know how to tackle me. I'm not a businessman, Commodore. I'm an artist; I'm a writer."

The Commodore smiled. "In that case," said he, "you might like to hear what really caused the present Spanish revolution. I said, 'really.' It would make an unusual and amusing story. If you'd care to write it, I could give you all the inside facts. Old T. J. was the innocent cause of the trouble. I sent him down to Barcelona to — But I could tell you this yarn better in the open air, so, if you feel like changing your mind about that round of golf —"

I think, after all, I will alter my private definition of a buccaneer. A buccaneer is a wicked old gentleman who always gets his own way. I said, "always."

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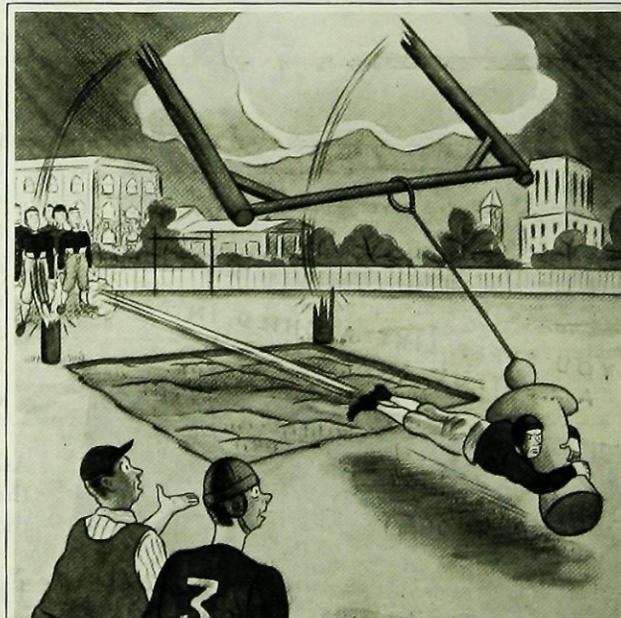
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"Well, I scored there, but I felt I'd made a mistake, because it's foolish to antagonize a man you're trying to get something out of. But I needn't have worried. That Treasury babe was a man, in spite of his looks. He had brains too. Says he, grinning, 'That'll l'arn me! I shouldn't have tried to teach my granddad to suck eggs. Now, let's clean up this mess. Lisbon's passing a three-million-pound credit to Molivenia, through us. Well, I'll hold it up. It shall not pass, if you'll do the rest, Eustace.'

"With pleasure, Cuthbert,' says the other infant prodigy. 'I'll intimate, tactfully, to the Molivenian ambassador that we've got him in a corner. If

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