

**WEST FLORIDA**  
The Coming Garden Spot of the Nation.

# The Pensacola

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## THE RANSOMING OF THE RICHARD A. BINGHAM

A Story of Mexico  
11 Years Ago

By F. F. Bingham.



The American Schooner, Richard A. Bingham.

(Continued from last Sunday).  
Frontera Mex., Nov. 1, 1903.  
A week since last writing. How time flies when you are busy.

My principal occupation has been making acquaintances and friendships, and playing politics. Don Felipe Palenque has been of great assistance to me in making the right kind of friends. I am now on good terms with the British consular agent, with the commandante, with the captain of the port, with the Jefe Pilota and with the Jefe Politico.

Say, but the last named has the sort of a job that would just suit me! We have nothing like it in the states. In English the title means "political chief."

He is the direct local representative of the federal government, with, as nearly as I can judge, absolute power over all the other branches of the local government—municipal, state and federal. Apparently he is accountable to President Diaz only.

This particular Jefe Politico wears a slouch hat and is a very democratic fellow, but it is amusing to see how the other officials with high-sounding titles and bright uniforms straighten up when he heaves in sight. He is likewise regarded with great awe by the common people.

The sole reward for his services in maintaining the dignity of the federal government in this section, is the possession of the beef monopoly. It must be a great cinch.

The possession of the beef monopoly gives the Jefe Politico a special influence over my enemy, Don Pepe Poch, because, as before noted, Don Pepe is doing a most lucrative business in exporting cattle to Yucatan.

The Jefe Politico could bat his eye, I believe, and put Don Pepe out of business.

I noticed a decided change in my condition for the better as soon as I got on good speaking terms with Don Felipe Palenque, and another, and even greater change after I had been seen taking a drink with the Jefe Politico. The very next time I met Don Pepe Poch, instead of passing me with a scowl, he stopped and we had a pleasant little chat. The drift of our conversation was that neither of us had any intention of being hard upon the other. I knew all the time that he could talk if he wanted to.

Don Felipe stands high here, and my good opinion of him grows. Besides the American Civil War, we discuss politics, philosophy and religion. If I get the "Richard" out of this scrape, it will be due to his friendship and good advice.

A Mr. Richards, an enemy of the consul's, has given me in writing a fictitious cash offer for the schooner and the cargo, which besides helping me, helps him. Americans abroad should stand by one another. I could not sell the cargo if I wanted to, and as nearly as I can figure it out, Mr. Richards could not pay cash for ever so small a part of the "Richard," or for the top tier of the deckload.

The consul looks worried, which I take to be proof that I am on the right tack.

Speaking of the consul, a curious thing happened this morning:

Overhanging part of the wharf where the schooner is lying was an old warehouse of flimsy construction except for the roof of heavy tile. The consul and I were standing under this overhang, talking about one thing and another, and I finally said that I did not like the looks of that warehouse with its heavy roof, and suggested that we might as well move from under.

The consul assented. We had moved about twenty feet, when BOOM—down came the whole blooming warehouse, smashing the wharf where we had been standing to splinters.

The consul stared at me in astonishment a moment and then exclaimed "The Devil sure looks after his own!" I did not like his inference and requested that he kindly leave me out of it.

Right after that another curious thing happened. Or at least I call it curious:

At the head of the wharf is a Chinese restaurant and laundry. I climbed over the wrecked wharf and went to the Chinaman's for some collars I had left with him. A man was sitting in the doorway that anyone would have looked at a second time. He wore the badly frayed garb of a merchant seaman. He was barefoot and his trousers were worn away nearly to his knees, showing several big raw sores on his shins. He looked badly used up.

He was looking at the schooner, and as I walked up read aloud her name and hailing port.

"Richard A. Bingham, Pensacola, U. S. A." painted across her stern. Looking up at me he remarked:

"I used to have an uncle living in Pensacola, Florida."

"What was his name?" I asked.

"Graham," he answered.

"Well," says I, "I guess we've got a cousin of yours aboard."

I got my collars and we went aboard, and sure enough, they are first cousins.—Jack Graham of Quebec and Jimmy Graham, of Pensacola.

Jack is a boilermaker by trade, and incidental to "seeing something of the world," has just finished a jaunt of four hundred miles over the mountains and through the jungles, from Salina Cruz on the Pacific ocean.

I have offered him passage on the "Richard," if we ever get out of here, which he gratefully accepts. In the meantime we have plenty to eat and we will doctor up his poisoned legs.

Frontera, Mex., Nov. 2nd, 1903.

Hurrah, I closed up everything this morning. My \$650 will not be quite enough, but Don Felipe Palenque will cash my sixty day sight draft against myself for any small balance that is needed. With further effort I could have gotten the bills still further reduced, but they were down to the point where the "Richard" can make money faster at sea than I could save it here by beating down Mexicans, so it was time to do business.

The bills were down to the point, too, where I am sure there will be nothing in it for the consul.

Have concluded to make the passage around to Belize with the schooner. It is likely to be a slow, tedious passage, with thousands of reefs to keep clear of, and if things should go contrary I doubt if this captain would ever make it.

We are now loading all the lumber that we can, and safely cross the bar, and under my bargain the balance will be lightened to us outside. We ought to sail by day after tomorrow.

Pensacola, 1914.  
There, that completes "the ransoming of the Richard A. Bingham," and there is no plausible excuse for the publication of the remainder of the Diary, for it pertains but remotely to Mexico.

For various reasons we did not sail from Frontera Bar until November 6th, on our seven hundred mile beat to windward.

We had light head winds and frequent calms, and we had to contend with the Yucatan current which boils up through the Yucatan channel and swings to westward over the great Campeche banks. Then there were the ever-present, badly-lighted or unlighted reefs—Arcas Cays, the bewildering Triangles, Madagascar Reef, Alacran Reef and the deadly Chinchora Reefs. We saw one of those new spoonbow Galveston fishing smacks piled up on Madagascar Reef.

There was but one break in this tiresome weather, and that was a hard "norther."

We were off Yalahau Lagoon, within a few hours sail of Cape Catouche, past which cape a "norther" would be a fair wind all the way to English Cay. For two days we had been working close inshore, to avoid the stronger current offshore. It was about sun-down, just as we were finishing an inshore leg, with the beach in plain sight, that the "norther" came down on us, without warning, and with all the fury of a pack of howling wolves.

We faced it instantly, and with all lower sail set, commenced to fight it, tooth and nail.

Now, the very most that any sailing ship can do for you, is to claw off from a lee-beach, in a gale. Many cannot do it. The "Richard's" work was cut out for her, and she buckled down to it nobly.

Hour after hour we drove her relentlessly into the teeth of the gale. Seas that were too big for her to climb over, or that were too quick for her, she busted open, and went through.

As she tore off mile after mile, I grew mightily proud. Says I, "Richard, you are worth ransoming. Go to it." I knew then, that with ordinarily good seamanship, she was good for fifty years.

By midnight, we had an offing of

twenty miles or more, and we hove to and had a smoke.

It was a grand gale, and I enjoyed it immensely.

Unfortunately the "norther" had an easterly cant, so we had to heave to on the port tack, and when the gale blew out, we were away off to westward in the neighborhood of Alacran Reef, where we had been a week before.

We arrived at Belize, that quaint old pirate town that is the capital of British Honduras, November 26th, late in the afternoon, after a seventeen-day passage. The aged pilot that boarded us off Mauger Cay, said that for a heavily laden lumber schooner, we had done well.

And now, if you will please get out your 1903 calendar, you will find that November 26th was Thanksgiving Day in the United States of America.

Our Belize Americans were doing their bravest to properly celebrate the day at the American consulate.

I was too late for the feast. The guests—a dozen or more—were sitting around on the wide, jalousied second-story gallery, when I arrived. Notwithstanding their imported Thanksgiving dinner, it was a doleful, silent party.

The evening air was sweet with tropical perfumes. The jargon of the Honduran natives passing along the shell road sounded to us softly and melodiously. The palm edcays across the harbor, on the edge of the blue Caribbean, stood out, each like a picture, a beautiful picture. It was entrancing.

To hard-headed, practical Americans, accustomed to fields planted unattractively in straight rows, accustomed to sooty factories and accustomed to hideous billboards, it would seem that the sight from Consul Avery's gallery that November evening—so lovely, and so filled with romance and mystery—would be satisfying. But it was not, or they had tired of it. They were homesick and showed it. They brightened wonderfully when I, only a couple of months from the states, was introduced to them.

Good Mrs. Avery, the consul's wife, took me back into the dining room, where I saw the frame of what had but recently been a fine American turkey, and I finished up the mince and pumpkin pie.

When we returned to the expatriated on the front gallery I was feeling very contented, and thankful, and with but slight urging related my adventures on this trip, by land and sea.

I told them about the lady—at Biloxi, I think it was—that kept the train waiting while she put on her shoes, about the hungry bunco man at New Orleans, and about Mr. Sheep-face and his bride. At this point I noticed considerable merriment among our ladies, which I understood later when I learned that an old man and his young bride were in our party.

Then I told them about the bull fight and Chapultepec. They were much interested in the Brewery Machinery Man (good soul!) and the ex-attache.

Colonel J. Bascom Jones, they had heard much of, and Dr. and Mrs. Hodgson they knew well.

My story about the little old lady from Syracuse that was begging for a living on the street of Vera Cruz, made them look pretty sober, but they had a good laugh when I told them about the Arkansas stenographer.

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They cross-questioned me searchingly as to the beautiful actress. My views as to the knocker-thieves, plainly expressed, were commended, particularly by Consul Avery.

They held their breath, just about, while I described the voyage from Vera Cruz to Coatzacoalcos, and were as convinced as I was, that the Bearded Mexican was drowned. They liked the old G. A. R. man immensely.

The Tenderfoot commanded all their sympathies, and they argued long as to whether it was a lost mine, a salted mine or buried treasure.

I told them about Frontera, and the governor, and the ball, and the river excursion to the shipbuilding plant, but they laughed until they cried when I told them about our humbug consul and the dried-apple pie.

I certainly entertained them. It was not because I am a good talker, for I am not. Nor because there was anything very wonderful about my adventures, for there was not. But because I was only two months FROM HOME.

I only made one bad break: One of the ladies asked how many children we had, and I answered:

"Three, ma'am, when I left home."

Even now I cannot see anything very wrong in my reply, for it seemed to me an age since I had left Pensacola, but the ladies shrieked, and Mrs. Avery exclaimed, "Oh, us Americans!"

There is just one more small matter that I want to mention:

When I reached home (via fruit steamer to New Orleans) I hired a new skipper for the "Richard" and reported "the ransoming of the Richard A. Bingham" to Consul W. W. Canada, at Vera Cruz, putting the larger part of the blame where it belonged on the U. S. consular agent at Frontera.

A few weeks later I was informed that a vacancy was about to occur in the consular service at Frontera, and was asked to nominate a successor to the then incumbent.

Very good, and whom do you suppose I nominated?

Why, none other than my friend, Don Felipe Palenque.

Whether he got the office or not, I do not know, but that makes no difference.

(THE END).

### Notice to Architects.

All plans for State Board of Health Laboratory, at Pensacola, must be in Jacksonville by Tuesday, July 28. Address Joseph Y. Porter, State Health Officer. 22 July 19



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