

THE IRON PIRATE

A Plain Tale of Strange
Happenings on the Sea

By MAX PEMBERTON

CHAPTER VI.

We caught the first train to London. When I got to a hotel I wrote two letters. One was to the Admiralty, the other to the office of the Black Anchor Line of American Steamships. I told Roderick what I had done, but he laughed at the idea. The next day I found myself standing in a meagerly furnished ante-room at the Admiralty, and there waiting the pleasure of one of the clerks, who had been deputed to talk with me.

"If there is any responsible person here," I said, "I should be glad to impart to him some very curious and, as it seems to me, very remarkable information concerning a warship which has just left Spezia, and is supposed to be the property of the Brazilian government."

"It's very good of you, don't you know," he replied, as he bent down to arrange his ample trousers; "but I fancy we heard something about her last week, so we won't trouble you, don't you know; and he felt to see if his bow were straight."

Within half an hour I sat in the private room of the secretary to the Black Anchor Steamship Company. He was a sharp man of business, keen-visaged as a ferret. I told him shortly that I had reason to doubt the truth of the statement that a warship recently built at Spezia was intended for the purposes set down to her; that I believed she was the property of an American adventurer whose motives I scarce dared to realize, and that if his company would agree to bear the expense, and to give me suitable recompense I would undertake to bring him the whole history of the nameless ship within twelve months. When I had done, he rang the bell for his clerk, and I could see that he felt himself in the company of a maniac.

Roderick was not at all surprised—it seemed to me rather that he was glad. "What did I tell you? Who will believe such a tale as we are hawking in the market place—selling, in fact, to the highest bidder? But I believe the whole of your dear friend's story, and therefore I have bought a steamer."

"You have done what?"

"At 2 o'clock to-day, in your absence, I bought the steam yacht Rocket. Before we go on board her, the yacht will be rechristened by Mary—who will stay with her dear maiden aunt in our absence—and will be named after your vessel Celsis. Her crew will consist of our silent friend, Captain York, of his brother as chief mate, and of your men now at Portsmouth, with half a dozen more. We shall need eight firemen, whom the agents will engage, and three engineers, already found. Your cook will serve us very well, and we want now only a second and third officer. As these men will be mixed up with us on the quarter-deck, I have told the agents to send them up to see you here—so you'll run your eye over them and tell me if they'll do."

"Roderick, my old friend, would you mind giving me that yarn from the beginning again?"

"I hate palaver," he said, "and didn't think to find you dense. Now, look here; until you read me that paper in your cabin, I don't know that I ever felt anger against any man, but I'll bring the man who murdered Martin Hall and many others to justice or I'll never know another hour's rest. Is it money you want? Well, what's mine is yours; and I'm worth two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. Is it profit of a dead man's work you're after? Well, then, mark your man, learn all about him, run him to his hole, and don't fear to recompense yourself. What we're going to do must be done at our cost, which is my cost. And what we're going to do isn't to be done at this hotel; it's going to be done on the high seas, and after that in America on the Hudson river, where, if Hall be right, is the home of Captain Black. It is to the Hudson river that I mean to go now."

In an hour I was closeted in the room below with Francis Paolo, who had come from the agents to seek the berth of second officer to the new yacht Celsis. I found him to be a sprightly, dark-faced Italian, apparently no more than 25 years old; and he greeted me with much smoothness of speech. He had served three years on a big steam yacht, and as he was unmistakably a gentleman and his discharges were in perfect order, I engaged him there and then. Had I known him then as I know him now, I would have paid a thousand pounds never to have seen him!

CHAPTER VII.

It was our last day in London. Roderick and I sat down to dinner in the hotel, the touch of depression upon us both. Mary had left us early in the morning to go to Salisbury, where her kinsfolk lived. We were going down to Plymouth by the 9 o'clock mail. So soon as we had dined, I went up to my room to put the small things of need away; but, to my amazement, the whole of the plate had been turned utterly inside out by one who had been there before me. My trunk lay upside down; my writing case was unlocked and stripped, my diary was torn and rent, my clothes were scattered. I thought at first that a common cheat of a hotel thief had been busy snapping up trifles, but I got a shock greater than any I had known since Martin Hall's death when I felt for his writing, which lay secure in its case, and found that, while the main narrative was intact, his letters to the police at New York, his plans, and his sketches had been taken. For the moment the discovery made me reel. I rang for a servant, who sent the manager to me. His perplexity and dismay were no less than mine.

"No one has any right to enter your rooms," he said; "and I will guarantee the honesty of my servants unhesitatingly. No one has been here after you since yesterday, when the Italian gentleman came. To-day he sent a man for a parcel he left here, but I know of no one else who has even mentioned your name."

Was I watched from the very beginning? Had I to cope, at the very outset,

with a man worth a million, the captain of a band of cut-throats, who stood at no foul work, no crime, as Martin Hall's death clearly proved? My heart ached at the thought: I felt the sweat dropping off me; I stood without thought of any man; the one word "watched" ringing in my ears like the surging of a great sea. And I had forgotten Roderick until he burst into my room, a great laugh on his lips, and a telegram in his hand.

"What do you think?" he said: "Mary's arrived all right."

"Oh, that's good; I hope she'll like Salisbury."

"Yes, but she isn't at Salisbury at all; she's at Plymouth, on board the Celsis. She went straight down there, and never as much as sent her aunt a telegram. You don't seem pleased."

"I'm not pleased," I said, going on with my packing. "I don't think she ought to be there."

"I know that; we've talked it all over, but when I think of it, I don't see where the harm comes in; we can't meet mischief crossing the Atlantic, and when the danger does begin in New York I'll see she's well on the lee-side of it."

It was full day when we reached the yacht, and I did not fail to cast a quick glance of admiration on her beautiful lines and perfect shape as I clambered up the ladder, at the top of which stood Captain York.

"Welcome aboard," he said, giving us hearty hand shakes; and without further inspection at that hour we followed him to the cabin, where steaming coffee brought the blood to our hands and feet, and put us in better mood.

"So my sister's here," said Roderick.

"Yes, last night, no orders," jerked the skipper with his usual brevity.

"Ah, we must see to that—and the second officer—"

"Still ashore; he left a bit of writing; he'll be aboard midday."

He had the writing in his hand, and was about to crumple it, but I caught sight of it, and snatched it from him. It was in the same handwriting as the letter which Captain Black had sent to me at the Hotel Scribe in Paris.

"What's the matter?" said Roderick, as he heard me exclaim; but the skipper looked hard at me, and was much mystified.

"Do you know anything of the man?" he asked very slowly, as he leaned back in his chair, but I had already seen the folly of my ejaculation, and I replied:

"Nothing at all, although I have seen that handwriting before somewhere; I could tell you where, perhaps, if I thought."

Roderick followed me to my berth and had the matter of the handwriting out. I told him at once of the robbery of some of the papers, and the coincidence of the letter which the second mate had left with the skipper. He was quick-witted enough to see the danger; but he was quite reckless in the methods he proposed to meet it.

"There's no two thoughts about this matter at all," he said; "we've evidently run right into a trap, but luckily there's time to get out again—of course we shall sail without a second mate!"

After a six hours' sleep I went aft to the quarter-deck to take stock of the yacht. I had scarce made my inspection of our new ship when Mary burst up from below and began her explanation, standing with flushed cheeks, while the wind played in her hair, and her eyes danced with the merriment of it.

"The question is," said I, "when are you going ashore again?"

"I don't know, but I guess I'll get ashore at New York, because I mean to go to Niagara."

She laughed saucily, throwing back her head so that her hair fell well about her shoulders. I turned round, hearing steps, and there stood our new second mate, Francis Paolo. Our eyes met at once with a long, searching gaze, but he did not flinch. If he were a spy, he was no poor actor, and he stood his ground without the movement of a muscle.

I watched him walk forward, and followed him, listening as he directed the men; and a more seaman-like fellow I have never seen. If he were an Italian, he had left all accent of speech in his own country, and he gave his orders smartly and in a tone which demanded obedience.

As I watched him from the hurricane deck, I heard a collier who had not yet left the ship give him some impudence. The new mate hit him such a terrific blow on the head with a spryglass that the fellow reeled through the open bulwarks right into his barge, which lay alongside. The men were hushed before a display of temper like this; the skipper on the bridge flashed red with disapproval, but said nothing.

The order "Hands heave anchor!" was sung out a moment after, and as Roderick joined me aft, the new Celsis steamed away from Plymouth and the episode was forgotten. And in that hour the great pursuit began.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was Paolo's watch. A night for dreamy thoughts of home, of kinsfolk, of the more tender things of life; but for us a night for the talk of that great "might be" which was then so powerful a source of speculation for both of us. And we were eager to talk, eager to know when we should next hear of Captain Black or of the nameless ship.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Roderick after twenty surmises of the sort, "if we heard something of her as we cross. I have given York orders to keep well in the track of steamers; and if your friend Hall be right, that is just where the unknown ship will keep. I would give a thousand pounds to know the story of the man Black. Is it possible that a man could commit piracy, to-day, in the Atlantic, where is the traffic of the world; where, if the powers once learned of it, they could hunt him down in a day? And yet, put into plain English, that is the tale your friend tells."

"It is; I have never read that from the first. Captain Black is either the most original villain living or the whole story is a silly dream—does, we have yet to learn if he is the master of the nameless ship; we have to learn if the nameless ship is not myth."

I remained above for an hour, gazing over the great sweep of the Atlantic. Paolo was on the bridge took all opportunity of watching him. I made pretense to go to my cabin and bawled a good-night to the mate I went; but it was only to put on my slippers and to get a warm coat, and made my way stealthily amidships. I was a stand aft of the skipper's cabin, where I could pry, yet not be seen. I heard Paolo address several of the men forward and it seemed to me that his mode of speech was not quite that which should be between officer and seaman.

It chanced that in this watch the new men were on deck, my elbow being in the port watch. Suddenly the far horizon over the starboard bow, I saw the flare of a blue light, but over the water; and showing as it did, the dark hull of a great ship. Paolo himself struck light to a flare which he held with him on the bridge, and answered a signal.

This action completely staggered me. Without a thought I rushed the ladder to the hurricane deck and stood beside him. He started as he saw me, and I could see him biting his lip, while an ugly look came into his eyes. "Good evening, Mister Me," I said; "will you kindly tell me what you burnt that blue light?"

"I burnt it to answer the signal yonder."

"But that was no affair of ours!" He shrugged his shoulders and muttered something about custom. Yet in another moment he made effort to recall himself, and met me with a open, smiling face which covered anger.

When I turned in at last, a little wind there was had fallen away. I must have slept very heavily for an hour, when a great sense of unrest and wing weariness took me, and I lay, now and then, dreaming, so that in all my dreams I saw the face of Paolo. I seemed to walk the decks of the Celsis, yet was Paolo there more strong and masterful than I.

Then the man Paolo stood over me, looking straight into my eyes and when I would have risen up to question him I was powerless. I opened my eyes and saw, during the veriest reality of time that others looked down into mine. I saw them for some small part of a second, yet in the faint light that came from the port I recognized the face and the form, and was certain of them; for the man who had been watching me as I slept was Paolo.

A quick sense of danger woke me thoroughly then. I put my hand to the tap of the electric light and the white rays flooded the cabin. But the cabin was empty and Roderick's dog sat by my trunk, and had, I could see, been licking my hand as I lay.

I knew not how to make out the meaning of it; but I was trembling from the horror of the dream, and went above in my flannels. I looked into Paolo's bunk, and he slept there, in so heavy a sleep that I began to doubt altogether the truth of what I had believed. How could this man have left my cabin as he had done, and yet now be berthed in his own? The dream had cheated me, as dreams often do.

But more sleep was not to be thought of. I fell to talk with Dan, and paced the deck with him, asking what was his opinion of our new second mate.

"It's not for me to be spouting about them as is above me," he said, "but you ask me a fair question. In course, I ain't the party to be thinking ill of any man, but what I do know I know. He's no more'n a ship with a voice under the fore-hatch."

I laughed at him as I asked, "And what's the matter with a ship like that? Why shouldn't there be a voice under the fore-hatch, Dan?"

"Well, you see, sir, as there ain't nobody a-livin' in that perticler place, you don't go for to look to hearin' of voices, or, in plain lingo, there's something queer about it."

The sound of a gunshot to leeward awoke me from my thoughts. Fearing that some vessel lay in distress, we put the helm up and went half-speed for a time. We had cruised thus for five minutes or more when a terrific report burst upon our ears. The thunderous echoing of a great weapon which a man-of-war only could carry.

The sound died away slowly; but in the same minute the fog lifted; and I saw, away a mile on the starboard bow, a spectacle which brought a great flush upon my face, and let me hear the sound of my own heart beating.

(To be continued.)

Great Mixture.

Banker—You have a lady stenographer?

Broker—Yes.

Banker—And she reads novels while she works?

Broker—Well, sometimes she glances at the one she leaves open on the desk. But why do you ask?

Banker—Oh, just because between every quotation of stock there was something about the villain with white teeth, the ever-pursued heroine and the hero with the manly chest.

Philosophy of the Times.

Slow Principal—How are your history recitations?

Smart Teacher—Don't have any.

S. P. (aghast)—Don't have any?

S. T.—No. Isn't it impressed on us that history repeats itself?—Baltimore American.

Qualified.

Hitts—Windig ought to make a successful campaign orator.

Pitts—Why do you think so?

Hitts—Because he talks so much and says so little.

Valuable.

Wife—Wake up, John! I'm sure I hear a burglar downstairs.

Husband—Great Scott! I hope he doesn't discover that chunk of ice in the refrigerator.

Seething.

Angry Patron (to waiter)—Here! Take away this lobster. Why, it's as cold as I am.



"Gumeridge isn't a man I've a great deal of use for," remarked the citizen with the protruding waistband. "I've only met him a few times, just when you've brought him in to lunch, but I'm free to confess I don't like him. You know I never beat about the bush. If I like a man I like him and if I don't I'm as liable to tell him so as I am to tell anybody else. I know he's a friend of yours, or you think he is; but he makes me tired, and that's all there is to it."

"Why, what's the matter with him?" asked the thin man with the bushy black beard. "I never heard of anybody who had any particular fault to find with Gumeridge. I think he's one of the finest fellows that ever stepped. I've known him for twenty years and I've never seen anything wrong with him."

"No, I don't suppose you have," said the citizen of circumference. "Still, I should think you'd have got sick of it in that time."

"Sick of what?"

"Taffy, soft soap, flattery; that's what I mean. That's what I don't like about him. He puts it all over you with a spade. That sort of thing sickens me."

"I didn't notice him putting it all over you. He seemed to be pleasant, as he generally is with everybody, but I don't think he flattered you."

"No, he didn't flatter me. He was flattering you."

"Gumeridge?"

"Yes, Gumeridge. Take it at lunch the last time. 'Let Billy order,' he says, 'I think Billy can order a lunch a little better than anybody I know of. If Billy wasn't a corking good business man he'd have made the bullethead kind of a head waiter. When I want something extra good, just the right kind of combination of eatables,

I tell you I put my trust in Billy every time."

"Well," said Billy, "I guess I do know a thing or two in that line."

"There are others," said the large man. "I've got a sneaking sort of notion that I'm pretty good in that line myself. But you were a corking good business man as well."

"Well, I'm not generally regarded as a slouch," said the thin man with the bushy black beard.

"Perhaps not. Mind you, I don't say you are. I don't think I'm any slouch as far as that goes, but I don't want a man going around in front of me with a trumpet proclaiming it. 'Billy's a good fellow,' 'Billy always was a good deal of a ladies' man,' 'You can't fool Billy on a diamond,' 'You couldn't get Billy to go into any crooked deal of that kind,' 'That's one thing I can say about Billy: I always know just where to find him. He'll stand by his friends. Billy will.' 'When I'm in doubt I always ask Billy's opinion,' and so on."

"I don't see anything particular for you to take exception to in that," said the bearded man.

"You don't?"

"I certainly do not."

"You like a man who flatters you, do you, then?"

"I don't see why you would call it flattery. I may have a few good qualities and Gumeridge may have discrimination enough to recognize them, but I hope that isn't any hanging offense. For the matter of that, he was a good deal taken with you and I heard him cracking you up no end the other day to some of the people at the club."

"Well," said the stout citizen with a slightly mollified air, "of course I may be mistaken in him. I wouldn't want to judge a man too hastily, and in other respects he struck me as a nice fellow. What did he say about me, Billy?"

—Chicago Daily News.

NEW LEASE OF LIFE FOR TOGO'S FLAG-SHIP.



A JAPANESE ENGINEERING TRIUMPH: THE RAISING OF THE MIKASA.

The Japanese never consider a vessel lost. All the battered hulks of the Russian navy have been recovered from the mud of Port Arthur, and are now efficient members of the Mikado's navy. Togo's flagship, the Mikasa, which took fire and sank in the harbor of Sasebo, has now, after months of patient engineering effort, been refloated. The hull was boarded up, all leaks stopped, and the water pumped out. The vessel rose to view mud-covered and rusty, but still capable of refitment, and very soon the admiral will be on his old bridge again. The fire is now known to have been due to spontaneous combustion caused by the decomposition of chemicals.

A Picked-Up Living.

A convict's complacent acceptance of life's possibilities is shown in a dialogue between the criminal and Captain Spencer, senior missionary of the English Church Army. To a question of the captain's as to what he did when out of prison, he replied:

"Well, in spring I does a bit of peapickin', and in the summer-time I does a bit of fruit-pickin', and in the autumn I does a bit of hop-pickin'."

"Oh!" said the captain. "What happens after that?"

"Well, now, mister," replied the convict, "I may as well be honest, and tell you that in the winter time I does a bit of pocket-pickin'!"

The missionary furrowed his brow in amazement, asking finally, "And what happens then?"

The convict answered laconically, "Why, here I am doing a bit of oakum pickin'."

Both Suspicious.

Baron Hubner went one evening to call upon President Thiers, who was then at the head of the French republic. The baron found the door of the house open and walked upstairs. In the dim light a man crept stealthily

toward him. Knowing that the president went in fear of his life and, unwilling to die a martyr in a cause not his own, the baron hurriedly explained, "I am not M. Thiers."

"I know that you are not M. Thiers," answered the mysterious stranger, "but I want to know who you are." Before answering the baron insisted upon knowing the identity of his companion. "Oh, I am M. Thiers' butler," was the answer. Hubner declared himself. "Ah," said the butler, with a sigh of relief, "I have your name first on the list of visitors." Each had taken the other for an assassin.

It Seems that Way.

"Say, pa," asked Willie, "what is a 'nonagenarian,' anyway?"

"A nonagenarian, my son," replied Willie's pa, "is usually a man who has or has not used tobacco all his life."—Philadelphia Press.

From the present prospect, the woman with a new fur coat is going to get more enjoyment out of life this winter than she did last.

To err is human—to lie about it is more human.

"VIA SECURA."

The Simple Life All that is Left for the Commonsense.

"What's up?" inquired Uncle Cyrus, looking up from his newspaper as Aunt Martha burst into the kitchen.

"W'y, Mary Coombs says that one of these here automobiles knocked a man down yesterday 'n' like to killed him—right in front o' the Judson house!"

"The Judson house ain't more'n five miles from the orchard," remarked Uncle Cyrus, reflectively, after the details of the accident had been discussed duly.

"Yes," said Aunt Martha, catching his thought, "suthin'll be happenin' right here at the Corners fast we know."

"It does seem," she continued, plaintively, "'s if folks can't be safe any-where nowadays. There was one comfort about the trolleys when they began to come into the villages—they kep' on their tracks, an' didn't kill right 'n' left. But with the automobiles riding over everything along the country roads—w'y, war times wa'n't much worse."

"Seems like we're drifting back to them old dark ages, don't it?" Uncle Cyrus regarded his anxious wife with twinkling eyes.

"An' if you escape what goes snortin' round the roads, mebbe you'll eat suthin' out of a can 'n' die before your day. Mercy me, sence you read out about all them scandals about packing sometimes I can't stomach to eat meat 't all!"

"Well, it ain't so bad's it might be," remarked Uncle Cyrus, comfortably. "It's ten to one you 'n' me'll live out our appointed time. There's no no-account on this here old homestead 'n' it looked putty p'pious out in the chicken yard this morning. Martie, we kin just stay home 'n' eat aigs!"—Youth's Companion.



Intestinal Indigestion.

It was formerly thought that the stomach was the main organ of digestion, and dyspepsia was supposed always to have its seat there. But this question has been much studied of late, with the result that the stomach has been found to be of little account, comparatively, in the preparation of the food for absorption. The most important part of digestion occurs in the upper part of the intestine, where the food, after leaving the stomach, is churned and mixed thoroughly with the bile and pancreatic secretion.

Since, then, the intestine takes such an important part in digestion, it is natural to suppose that a failure to perform this function properly would give rise to serious disturbances of health, and such, in fact, is the case.

Intestinal indigestion is a not uncommon affection at all periods of life, and is especially prevalent in children. The chief symptoms are flatulence, or wind, more or less colic, diarrhoea, or more often constipation, or an alternation of the two; and practical starvation, as shown in weakness and emaciation.

The treatment is mainly through diet, but this will vary, of course, according to age. In an infant the problem is a difficult one. If the child is fed artificially, all prepared foods containing starch should be taken away, and cows' milk, modified as to the amount of fat, sugar or casein it contains, according to the physician's directions, should be substituted.

If the infant is nursing, the life of the mother should be studied, for the state of her health may affect the milk injuriously.

In older children and adults the amount of fats and of starchy foods must be carefully regulated. Cereals, pastry, rice, potatoes and bread must be cut out of the dietary for a time, or taken in very small quantity. When eaten at all they should be most thoroughly, even excessively, chewed, for in this way they may be in great measure digested by the saliva before reaching the intestine.

The diet should consist mainly of milk, white of eggs, and the more easily digestible meats and fish. The diarrhoea or constipation should be regulated, and sometimes the administration of intestinal antiseptics is beneficial. Regular exercise in the open air is of great value in the treatment. The cold bath or shower-bath is often of service, when it is followed by a healthy reaction.—Youth's Companion.

Lloyd's Blackest Day.

Sir Henry Hozier, who has just retired after thirty-two years' service as secretary of Lloyd's, said not long ago that the blackest day he could remember was in October, 1881, when 108 vessels were posted as lost in twelve hours. When a vessel is lost it is announced by the tolling of the bell which hangs beside the crier's box. It is tolled once when a vessel is lost, twice when a missing vessel comes to port.—Kansas City Journal.

Amended.

"Your headline says," remarked the critical visitor, "that the candidate 'talked to many.'"

"Well?"

"It should have said 'talked too much.'"—Philadelphia Ledger.