

The Pirate of Alastair

By
RUPERT SARGENT
HOLLAND

Author of "The Count at Harvard," etc.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

I was up the stairs like a flash, to find Duponceau, one of the old broadswords in his hand, holding the balcony. Men's heads were to be seen just above the flooring of the porch, where the invaders had climbed by means of my trellises, but the owners of those heads seemed very little disposed to come farther. They had no reserves to cover their attack from the protection of the dunes, and Duponceau was proclaiming that he would behead the first rascal that raised himself another inch. At the ring of determination in his voice, no wonder that no one came on. I had barely reached his side, however, when a man flung a handful of sand full in Duponceau's face, temporarily blinding him, at the same moment that another leaped up the trellis and vaulted over the balcony rail. I met him face to face, and recognized the surly chap who had spied on me that first day from the woods. He had not gained his balance when I fell upon him, hoping to topple him back against the rail. Instead, his feet shot out from under him, and, clutching at me, he fell flat on the balcony. He lay there panting a second, his arms about my back, while I tried to get my hands upon his chest to push myself up. Suddenly his grip tightened, and, with a lurch, he rolled me over, so that now I lay underneath and pinned by his arms. Then he tried my game, and, hands on my chest, sought to drive the breath from my body. He was heavy, and I felt myself going, going, drawing each breath harder, seeing red more fully, when with a jerk the pressure lightened, and I looked up to see Charles, his brawny arms about the man's shoulders, slowly but inexorably throwing him over on his side. His hands relaxed, there was a groan, and the man lay flat on his back, Charles securely kneeling on him while I struggled to my feet.

Meantime Duponceau, his sight clear again, had held the balcony, and more, had driven the men down the supports by striking with his sword over the edge.

"Throw him over," he commanded us now, and quickly we had the hapless creature up on the railing and had dropped him into the sand below. He fell with a soft thud, and we turned to other matters.

It was high time. Baffled at the balcony, the enemy were already trying to batter in the front door. At the first sounds below-stairs, Rodney had drawn my dinner-table and the heavy oak settle across the door, and fortified it with every heavy weight in doors. Now the battering began, and Duponceau and Charles joined him while with an axe I found in my den I hacked away the trellises that climbed to the balcony. Verily the fight was hot when I would cut down my own property.

Crash—crash! A heavy log struck the front door and ripped away a panel. The log was withdrawn, there was a shout, and again came the thudding crash, splintering the upper part of the door and carrying clear in to the settle. I was mad, mad through and through, at the thought of these desperadoes, and a glance at Charles face told me that he was the same. We built up the barricade, we tried to stay it against the next assault, but this time the upper part of the door burst inward, and we were almost face to face with the foe. Rodney and I crammed the dining-room table into place, and threw the chairs behind it. I cared little now if all the furniture were beaten into splinters.

"Now!" cried Duponceau. There was a boom, a crash, and the battering-ram shot half way into the house. As it cleaved away the door, Duponceau leaped high on to the wreck of the table and laid about him with his sword. I saw one man fall sideways, and the rest, startled into fear by this man with eyes ablaze, stand, hesitate, and fall back.

"Come on!" he cried. "There is room for two abreast!" But no one came on; the passage through that open doorway looked dubious.

A hurried conference, a quick dispersal, and then the enemy was back, armed with clubs cut from the woods. Now they came on with a rush, and the battle joined. Pistols were discarded; it was to be a fight of our old rusty swords, and sticks found by Charles, and the staffs of the pines. Two men leaped into the breach and fell on Duponceau, another slipped in and fell to Rodney's care, while Charles and I gripped our weapons and waited. Duponceau thrust at one of his assailants and with a jerk threw the other across the broken table almost at my feet. A blow aimed at my head fell on Charles' staff, and he had the man reeling in a corner with a sudden thrust of his arm. Another man followed, and he and I laid about each other, blow falling on sword, and sword on pine-wood. We had the advantage in that we stood on the chairs, the table, and what was left of the door, and the enemy had to spring against our entrenched position. Face to face with us, toppling over the broken furniture, their armor passed, and gradually we drove them back, pressing them out of the doorway harder than they had pressed in. The man opposite me aimed a savage blow, I dodged, and, grappling with him, threw him with all my strength across the table. From there Duponceau

rolled him out against his comrades. All this time Monsieur Pierre had fought like a demon, but now one man fell against his legs, while another struck him a glancing blow across the shoulders, and before he could gain his footing he fell from the table back into the room, striking against the settle. He lay there still. Rodney was in his place, and I jumped beside him.

"Now!" I cried, and a moment later we had what was left of the enemy safely at bay.

The attacking party gathered together, and, with many ill looks at us, finally withdrew. Charles pulled the man he had in the corner up before us, and asked what should be done with him. I pointed out to where the others were turning up the beach.

"It seems almost too good for him," said Charles.

"Yes," said I; "it does." I had to hold myself tight in check now as I looked at my broken door and devastated room. "Get out," I cried, "before I begin to talk to you, and tell the rest of your gang that the next time they batter in a man's house I hope they get their just deserts. A nice band of ruffians they make! The next time you look in this door there'll be murder done. Get out!"

The man got out, helped over the barricade by a none-too-gentle lift from Charles.

I turned to Duponceau; he was just sitting up, rubbing his shoulders. He struggled up to his feet and looked about him.

"I'm afraid, Selden, you'll never forgive yourself for sheltering me. I didn't think it would really come to this."

"I did," I answered. "I knew it, and I knew we'd beat them off. But if they ever come again, it'll be end of one or the other of us."

"I'd better surrender," he said.

I gave a short laugh. "I'd put you in chains first. This is my house, and I have what guests I choose, and all the powers of Europe shan't prevent me! Do these people think we're living in the Middle Ages?"

"I'm inclined to think we are," said Rodney, from his seat on the overturned settle. "But I've always had a liking for those days, so I don't object."

Then we went to work to build up the front of the house as best we could.

CHAPTER XIX.

By the time we had finished our repair the morning was still not far advanced towards noon. I had lighted a pipe and was smoking in the full joy of rest after battle, when Rodney came up to me with a puckered line between his eyebrows.

"I'm afraid," he remarked, "we're going to get let down for the rest of the day."

"Why, man!" I ejaculated, "you wouldn't be going through that sort of racket each hour in the twenty-four, would you?"

He smiled at my answer. "Not exactly, but just at present we're playing the part of a lot of cooped up rats too realistically to suit your humble servant. I'll be expecting them to set fire to the house next. Besides that, I shouldn't be surprised if the club would start a search for me at any moment. Anything may happen in my office, the market may have gone to pot, and my customers be ready to tar and feather me."

"Well," I agreed, "that's all true, and yet if you go it leaves Duponceau just so much more unprotected."

"I know," he mused thoughtfully, rubbing his cheek with his hand. "I wish to the deuce I knew who the man was." He looked at me sharply. "Haven't you an inkling, Felix?"

I shook my head. "All I know is that he came out of the sea in a storm, with his precious treasure-box, and that Fate has apparently appointed us to protect him from his enemies until he sees fit to return into the sea again. On one subject he's absolutely unapproachable: his antecedents."

"Then why," pursued Rodney, "did you ever take such an infernal liking to him?" I considered. "Why did you?" Our eyes met, and we both smiled, chuckled, and then laughed.

"There's an old French adage," said Rodney—"chances la femme." He took a turn or two up and down the room. Then "See here, Felix," he said, "there's no denying the fact that we're both of us in the same boat, figuratively speaking, even if no longer physically. You had a great drag from the start, because you were living such an unusual sort of life, and were probably a woman-hater, certainly had no use for society. Those things take with a girl brought up in New York."

I smoked stolidly. "You won the first wound, and that takes with a woman anywhere."

He looked at his bandaged arm and smiled reminiscently. He was probably thinking of that half-hour when she had dressed it.

"But the main point is," he resumed, "that we both knew that the particular girl in question loved romance better than anything else in the world."

"And that Duponceau was romance personified," I added, "which fully explains our actions."

Rodney puffed at his cigarette in silence.

"Yet I've grown very fond of the man," he said presently. "He's brave, and he's a gentleman."

"I'm fond of him, too. I wouldn't give him up now for the world. I intend to stay right here until something happens."

Rodney finished his cigarette and threw it away. "If you don't mind," he said, "I'll steal over to your farmer's and ride horse to the club. I've a feeling that something may be doing in the outer world, and that I ought to get next to a ticket. I'll not be long, and I don't think they'll come back before afternoon."

"Go, by all means. The man will give you the horse and show you an inland road, so you'll not fall in with these people. We can get on all right until night-fall."

Rodney started to leave, then turned again.

"I was sore," he said, "that first afternoon when I found you and Barbara having tea here. I'll admit that I'd followed her from New York, expecting to have a clear field; but—well, one can't always get what one wants, and there's luck in this sort of a fight, just as there is in the Street; but it is a good fight, and that's more than I can say for some of the affairs one sees in town. I'm not sore any longer."

He smiled, and somehow his genuineness brought me to my feet.

"It's a square fight all round," I said.

We went down-stairs together, and I pointed out the way to the farm-house. Then I returned to my den to finish my pipe, and to wonder if Rodney was going to the club for news or only to see Barbara. The brief glimpse of her that morning had certainly set up both a thrill.

The hours slid past without exertion on my part. Duponceau and I had lunch a little after twelve, and then I returned to the study and stretched myself on the leather couch, with a book before my eyes. The summer sun, warm and sensation-dulling, came in through the window, and the salt breeze was as heavy on the eyes as poppies. The world drowsed, the beach and my house were too warm and still and lethargic for action, and my eyelids closed despite my best intentions. I slept long, deep, and like a tired child, without dreams.

There was a man's step on the stairs. I sat up and rubbed my eyes; I stretched forth my arms and put my feet to the floor. Rodney entered and flopped into the leather arm-chair, an ironic smile on his lips, his eyes bright with the news that he brought.

"Well," he said, "I know: Duponceau's Etienne!"

"Yes, Etienne, the French Colossus, the man who made fortunes in months and lost them in hours, who planned to make the poor of France rich and made them poorer than before, the man who's played hob with the markets of Europe for the last six months."

I could say nothing; I was aghast.

"The most precious scoundrel of the age," said Rodney, "but also potentially the greatest benefactor. It was a toss which way his coin would fall, and it fell wrong."

"Well," I said, "I certainly never should have thought it!"

"Nor I," assented Isip; "never, never, never."

"How do you know?" I demanded.

"It's public property. It's all in the papers," he added, pulling a newspaper from his pocket and flinging it over to me. "He escaped from France on a merchant vessel, and landed on the New England coast, carrying with him papers and securities of the greatest value. A score of men have been trying to bag him and the papers without unnecessary noise."

"And we have been harboring him!" I added.

"We certainly have, and doing our best to help him evade his enemies and make off with the remnant of his spoils."

"I can't help it," I said; "I like him, and I don't believe he's as bad as people make out. He's certainly a born leader."

"So was Napoleon," answered Rodney, "and it wasn't until he failed that people saw the other side of his genius. I fancy Duponceau's a genius—he might, perhaps, have been an empire-builder—but his ideas went farther than his means, and so when his bubble bursts the world calls him a villain."

"If his intentions were good, where does the crime lie?"

(To be continued.)

Strange Omission.

A woman who visited the British museum recently inquired of an attendant: "Have you no skull of Cromwell? I have been looking all around for a skull of Oliver Cromwell."

"No, madam," replied the attendant. "We've never had one."

"How very odd!" she exclaimed. "They have a fine one in the museum at Oxford!"—Ladies' Home Journal.

An Eye to Business.

Art Dealer—What! You want \$500 for that picture? You must be crazy. De Auber—Not necessarily. I'm merely trying to discount the future. Art Dealer—How's that?

De Auber—Two hundred years hence that picture will probably sell for \$5,000—but I'm willing to take 90 per cent off for cash.

Spring Cleaning.

"Dad, I was simply great in relay events," boasted the boy from college.

"Good enough, son. We'll make use of them talents. Your ma will soon be ready to re-lay the carpets."—Washington Herald.

More Practical.

"When we get married, Nora, I'll be willing to lay down my life for you."

"I'll be quite satisfied if you lay down a carpet or two, now and then."

A friend's faults should be known but not abhorred.—Portuguese.



Women and Poultry.

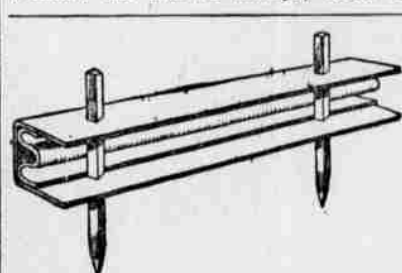
There is no field open to women today that is less crowded than the poultry field; none that offers as good returns for one's labor; none that affords so much freedom when taken as a vocation, and none that makes one so nearly independent of others. Some of our best planned poultry farms, as well as our best-paying ones, are the outgrowth of woman's skill and ingenuity in planning, and her financial ability in conducting the enterprise. Most women show a qualification for neatness about poultry of which men are occasionally void, and as cleanliness is an important factor, she often outstrips our "lords of creation" in results obtained. The care of poultry is productive of good health to women engaged therein, giving them sufficient exercise in the open air, and just enough care and responsibility to make their work interesting and to make them feel their importance. The field for women is almost unlimited, and it pays her better profits than she can reasonably expect from most other business ventures.—Commercial Poultry.

Destroying Water Hyacinth.

Spraying is the method followed at the present time by the government in destroying the water hyacinth, which has proved a serious impediment to navigation on many of the Southern rivers of this country. A great number of suggestions have been tried, and the fine spraying process has been found to be the most effectual and economical. Two government boats are engaged in the work. Each is equipped with tanks for the boiling of a mixture of white arsenic, sal soda and water. This is sprayed on the plants, and as the latter are about 98 per cent water there is very little residue after they wilt down under the action of the poisonous solution. That the solution kills the plants absolutely has been proved in every case where the conditions were such as to prevent the introduction of new plants within the area sprayed.

Harrow Tooth Fastener.

John A. Johnson, of Lancaster, Wash., has patented a harrow tooth fastener, the object of which is to fasten harrow-teeth in U bar harrows without the use of clamps, bolts or nuts.



It consists of a square or diamond-shaped hole pressed through the U bar of the harrow for the reception of the teeth, and a W-shaped fastener pressed out of sheet metal inserted between the teeth and the back of the bar, with a corresponding round notch in the tooth to receive the fastener. Thus, one fastener holds all the teeth in the bar.

Cultivate the Orchard.

The young orchard should be cultivated, but not with grain or grass crops. Corn, potatoes, beans or other vegetables, well cultivated, are ideal for a young orchard. The ground should be stirred every two or three weeks until the middle of August. In going through the orchard with the harrow, care should be taken not to injure, bruise or "bark" the trees. To avoid this, the horses ought to be muzzled and the outside portions of traces and whiffletrees padded.

In going through some young orchards early in the season for the purpose of demonstrating pruning, Prof. Surface found many cases of trees which had been seriously damaged through being grazed by whiffletrees, or struck or bitten by the horses. In going through the orchard, rub off all "unnecessary sprouts."—Rural World.

Weight and Feed.

When one comes to figure on a difference in weight for the same age and feed of 200 to 400 pounds, and a difference in price of several cents, he can see as plainly as he can see anything that there is more money in improved stock. Suppose a 2-year-old scrub steer weighs 900 pounds and sells for 4 cents a pound, while a 2-year-old pure bred weighs 1,200 and sells for 6 1/4 cents, there will be \$36 for one and \$75 for the other. Is there any man in his right senses who can think it will not pay to keep well-bred stock when he compares these figures? They are not imaginary at all, but represent the quota-

tions in the market reports during the last few months. The real question then is, how to get better cattle. Bulls are cheap just now, and in fact have been selling lower than cows and heifers.—Denver Field and Farm.

Ants Destroy Scale Insects.

Prof. Harlan of California has discovered that the ordinary black ant will remove the scale from fruit trees without injuring the tree or leaves in the least. He says their work is more complete than that accomplished by spraying or by any of the imported insects. The ants are captured by placing a plate of sugar near an ant hill, and when covered with ants the plate is put in the forks of the infected tree. The ants leave the sugar and go to work on the scale. As soon as they all leave the sugar the plate is placed at the foot of the tree, and as the ants come down after having cleaned the tree of scale, they again assemble on the sugar and are thus easily removed to another tree.

Supply of Nitrate.

It is claimed that at the present rate of use the known supply of nitrate of soda will be exhausted in less than fifty years, while as a matter of fact the consumption is increasing steadily and rapidly. It is therefore safe to say that before twenty-five years have passed the supply will be low, unless new fields are discovered, and that the price will be high. Over a million and a half tons were used last year. This is not encouraging for the young generation of farmers, except for the fact that we will always have our clovers, our alfalfa, our cowpeas—the great legume family—and properly rotated these will supply the soil with nitrogen from the inexhaustible supply in the air.

A Butter Fraud.

An ingenious fraud in the butter line was brought to light recently in England. In that country the amount of moisture in butter is limited by law to 16 per cent. Australian and New Zealand butters, on the other hand, usually contain only 8 per cent of water. Taking advantage of this fact, several firms imported large quantities of these colonial butters, to which 8 per cent of water was then added, thus bringing them down to the British standard. As the added water naturally cost nothing and the product was sold at the current price, a substantial profit was made.

Slaughter of Robins.

Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee have the undesirable distinction of being the only states in the Union where the slaughter of robins is permitted by law. Recent investigations show that not less than 9,000,000 robins are killed in these three states during the winter months. It is a fact that every robin earns \$1 in the destruction of insects injurious to crops every year. The hunters sell them at 5 cents apiece. This is a waste of millions of dollars and ought to appeal to the hard, common sense of every farmer. It ought to be stopped in every state.

A Threshing Record.

George W. McKnight of Howell, Ky., in a run of twelve and one-half days, threshed 18,000 bushels of wheat, moved every day, sometimes as far as three miles, and never broke a belt or touched the cylinder. Mr. McKnight reports that the best yield he found was twenty-three acres for George Wood, that averaged twenty-six bushels. Of his own crop fifty acres averaged twenty-two bushels, and the whole crop of 100 acres averaged twenty bushels. All of the crops he threshed made from fifteen to twenty bushels an acre.

Food Value of Buttermilk.

Buttermilk is a nutritious and wholesome food, or drink, and it is relished by a great many people. There is a good sale for it in all towns and cities of any size. The quality of buttermilk, like all other foods, is determined by the way it is prepared. To secure the most wholesome product, keep the milk as pure and clean as possible, use the most pure water obtainable and practice absolutely clean methods in churning. It must be held at a low temperature in order to have it fresh for any great length of time.

Destroying Weeds.

In Denmark the farmers are compelled by law to destroy all weeds on their premises, and in France a farmer may prosecute his neighbor for damages if the neighbor allows weeds to go to seed. It would save millions of dollars in this country if laws prevailed which prevented farmers from growing weeds to seed on their own as well as others' farms.