

THE IRON PIRATE

A Plain Tale of Strange Happenings on the Sea

By MAX PEMBERTON

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

The room was filled with the steam of sea-going humanity; foul smoke from fuel pipes floated in choking clouds to the dirt-tinged ceiling. Now and again, between the shouting and the singing, a young girl, whose presence in such a company turned my heart sick, played upon a harp, and there was a mahogany-faced hag whom the men addressed as "Mother Catch." She seemed to have the eye of a hawk; nor did I escape her glance. She shuffled up to me and stood glaring with her shining eyes for a moment or two, the very presentment of an old-time witch. The glass door again swung open; three men entered through it, and I recognized the three of them in a moment. The first was the Irishman, "Four-Eyes;" the second was the lantern-jawed Scotsman, who had been addressed in Paris as "Dick the Ranter;" the third was "Roaring John," into whose face Dan had emptied the contents of his duck gun three days before. The ruffian had his mouth all bound in a bloody rag, but he was in nowise depressed; and, although the gun had stopped his speech, he smacked Paolo on the back when he greeted him.

One of the men started a wild dance. It was an extraordinary exhibition, and it pleased the men about so that they roared with delight. I was watching it, but my attention was suddenly diverted by the sense that something under a near table was pulling at my leg. I looked down quickly, and saw a strange sight: it was the black face of the lad Splinters, who had been treated so brutally in Paris. He, crouching under the table, was making signs to me, earnest, meaning signs, so that without any betrayal I leaned my head down as though upon my hands, and spoke to him:

"What is it, lad?" I asked in a whisper. "Don't stop here, sir!" he answered in a state of great agitation. "They know you, and are going to kill you!"

He said no more, crawling away at once; but he left me hot with fear. I left my seat, and pushed amongst the men, passing nearer and nearer to the street, until at last I was at the very portal itself. Then I saw that a change had been made while I had been sitting. The doors of glass were wide open, but the way to the street without was no longer clear—an iron curtain had been drawn across the entrance.

This was a terrible discovery. It seemed to me that the iron door had been closed for an especial purpose. I knew, however, that when the dance was over, some of the audience would wish to go out, and so I walked by the curtain. The men were then about to push their tables to the center again, but the hag raised her voice and cried:

"As you are, my pretty gentlemen; it's only the first party ye've been treated to. No, no; ye don't have the door drawn yew. Good boys, all of ye, there's work to do; ho! ho! work to do!"

Somehow, all the men immediately around me slunk away, and I found myself standing quite alone, with many staring at me. The four men whom most I feared had turned their backs, but the rest of the assembly had eyes only for the terrible woman and for myself. Presently the discordant music began again. The hag moved with a hobble and a jig to the far end of the room, and began to come straight down to the door where I stood. I know not what presentiments forewarned me to beware as the creature drew near. I had my revolver in my pocket, but had I shown it twenty barrels would have answered the folly. There was nothing to do but to face the screeching woman; and this I did.

At the last, the old witch, who had danced for some moments at a distance of ten paces from the spot where I stood, became as one possessed. She uttered a piercing shriek, and hurled herself almost on me. In that instant I remember seeing the three men with Paolo suddenly rise to their feet, while the other in the room called out in their excitement. But the hag herself drew from her breast something that she had concealed there; and, as she stood within a yard of me, she brought it crash upon my head, and all my senses left me.

CHAPTER XIII.

When I regained consciousness it was because rain beat upon my face, a drizzling warm rain of late summer, and there was spray from a fresh sea. For some minutes I set myself to ask where I was; but I knew that I was bound at the left hand and at my feet, and when I raised my head, I saw that I lay in an open boat, but my feet were towards the stern of it, and I could see nothing of the power which moved the boat or of the scene about us.

The boat in which I lay was painted white, and was of elegant build. She had all the fine lines of a yacht's jolly-boat; and when I raised my head I could see that her fittings had been put in only at great expense. The silence was broken at last by a shout, and the boat ceased to move.

"All hands, make sail!" cried someone; and after that I heard the "yo-heave" of the men hauling, as I judged, at a mainsail. The second order, "Sheets home!" proved to me that I was behind a sailing ship, perhaps a yacht. There came a sudden shout from the deck of the ship, "Ho, Bill, is the young 'un gone?"

"No, my hearty."

And then I heard a voice I knew, the voice of the Irishman, "Four-Eyes."

"Is it the boy ye're mindin'? Throw him a sheet, one av yer; it's meself that's not bringin' the gunner a dead body when he wants a live one!"

They tried to throw me a sheet as the man had ordered, and I heard it fall in the water at my head. I pondered long on the remark of the Irishman, that the "gunner" wanted me alive. It was quite clear that my life was safe from these men until they reached their chief.

The rain ceased and the sun shone, drying my clothes upon me. I struggled and in doing so I found that the ropes binding my right arm were tied with common hitches; and my experience as a yachtsman let me get free of them with very little trouble. I did not sit up at once, but turned my head to look at the boat which towed me, and saw that she was a barque-rigged yacht after the American fashion; her name Labrador being conspicuous across her stern. My boat was towed by a double hawser, but no man watched me, and I lay down again reassured. The hope of escape was already in my head, for I judged that we could not be far out from New York. It occurred to me that if they would only let me be until night I could get my left hand free.

Finally there was a change in the monotony of the scene. I heard an order to heave the barque to. I felt all motion cease, and then someone hauling at the hawser, so that the jolly-boat was pulled against the side of the bigger ship; and, looking up, I saw half a dozen of Black's gang watching me from the quarter-deck. Then a ladder was put over the bulwark, and "Four-Eyes" came down to it with a great can of steaming stuff. He stepped off the ladder to the stern seat, and then bent over me. But I saw this only, that he had a knife in his belt; and I made up my mind in a moment to get it from him.

He held the rope with one hand while he put the can of hot stuff to my lips with the other. I drank half of it with great gulps, feeling the warmth spread through my body to my very toes as the broth went down; and a great hope consoled me, for I had his knife, having snatched it from him when first he stooped. The good luck of the theft made me quick to empty the pot of gravy. Four-Eyes went over the side again, and the yacht moved onward lazily in the softest of breezes from the west.

When I deemed that I had waited long enough I cut away the remaining ropes at my feet, and crouched unbound in the boat. I crawled to the bow, and began to cut the strands of the hawser one by one. I felt my boat go swirling away on the backwash. It was a moment of supreme excitement, and I lay quite flat, waiting to hear if I were missed; but I heard no sound, and looking around me presently, I saw the yacht away a mile, and I knew that I was a free man.

When a couple of hours had passed I took a new consolation in the thought that I must be in the track of steamers bound out from, or to, New York; and in this hope I covered myself in the tarpaulins and lay down again to shield myself from the wind which blew with much sharpness as the night grew. I did not sleep, but lay half-dazed for an hour or more, and was roused only at a curious light which flashed above me in the sky. The light was clearly focused, being a volume of intensely bright, white rays which passed right above me with slow and guided motion, and then stopped altogether, almost fixed upon the jolly-boat. I knew then that it was, and I sat up to see the great beams of a man-of-war's search-light, showing an arc of the water almost as clear as by the sun's power.

The light shone in all its brightness for some five minutes; then it died away suddenly, and on the spot whence it had come I could just distinguish the dark hull of a steamer. Some moments, long moments to me, passed in feverish conjecture; and then in the pathway of the light rekindled I saw in all distinctness the outline of a long-boat, fully manned, and she was coming straight to me. Its progress seemed slow; the men in it made me no manner of signal. They came in a beeline towards me, and the radiating light never moved once whilst they rowed. In the end, I myself broke the silence, shouting lustily to them, but getting no answer until I had repeated the call thrice. The fourth cry, loud and in something desperate, brought the response so eagerly awaited; but when I recognized the voice of him who then hailed me I fell down again in my boat with a heart-stricken burst of sorrow, for the voice was the Irishman's, and Four-Eyes spoke:

"Avast hallin', young 'un," he cried; "we ain't goin' to part along of your society no more, don't you be frettin'!"

They dragged me into their boat, and, taking my own in tow, they rowed rapidly to the distant steamer, on whose deck I stood presently; but not without profound fear, for I knew that at last I was a prisoner on the nameless ship.

CHAPTER XIV.

There was light from six lanterns, held by giant negroes, to greet me when I had mounted the ladder and was at last on the deck of the great ship; but none of the men spoke a word, nor could I see their faces. One of the men silently touched me on the shoulder, and I followed him along a narrow strip of iron deck, past a great turret which reared itself above me, and again by the covered forms of quick-firing guns. We descended a short ladder to a lower deck, and so to the companion way, and to a narrow passage in which were many doors. One of these he opened, and motioned me to enter, when the door was closed noiselessly behind me, and I found myself alone.

My first feeling was one of intense surprise. I had looked to enter a prison. The cabin was not large, but one more artistic in effect was never built. Hung all around with poppy-colored silk, the same material made curtains for the bunk. It was employed also for the cushions and covering of the armchair and the couch, and to drape the dressing glass and basin which were in the left-hand corner. It seemed, indeed, that the whole room was a harmony in scarlet, with a scarlet ceiling and scarlet hangings. The feet sank above the ankles in a soft Indian rug, which was ornate with the quaint mosaic-like workings and penetrating colors of all Eastern tapestry. For light, there was

an arc lamp, veiled with gauze of the faintest yellow. The room would have been perfect but for a horrid blot upon it—a blot which stared at me from the outer wall with bloodshot eyes and hideous visage. It was the picture of a man's head that had been severed from the body. The picture almost terrified me, but I thought, if no worse harm befell me, what odds! and I sat down, all wondering and dazed.

My conclusion was that the man Black could be showing me this marked consideration only for some motive of self-interest. It was evident that he had been aware of my intention to follow him from the moment when Roderick purchased our new steamyacht. He had put one of his own men craftily upon the ship to watch us, and had made a bold attempt to deal with us in mid-Atlantic. Filled there, he had taken advantage of my folly in entering such a place as the Bower, and had given orders that I should be carried to his own ship.

Suddenly the electric light went out. I sat quite still for some half an hour. There was no noise of movement save on the deck above, and my own cabin remained as still as the grave. It appeared that I was to be left unmolested for that night at any rate. I undressed and lay down in one of the most seductive beds I have met with at sea. I was so weary and fatigued with my sufferings in the open boat that I fell asleep at once, and must have slept for many hours. I awoke in the day. The red curtains opposite my bunk were drawn back, admitting dull light from a port hole through which I could look upon a tumbling sea, and a sky all gilt with rain clouds. My armchair was occupied by a man, dressed with all the scrupulous neatness of a thorough-going yachtsman. He had a bright, open face, and there was something refined and polished in his voice.

"Good morning to you," he said; "I hope you have slept well? I didn't wake you before, because sleep is the best medicine in your case. I'm a doctor, you know."

"Oh! you're the physician-in-ordinary to the crew, I suppose; you must see a good deal of practice."

He looked rather surprised at my meaning remark, and then said quite calmly, "Yes, I write a good many death certificates. You must be hungry. I will ring for breakfast; and, if you would take a rub, your bathroom is here."

He opened the door in the passage, and led the way to a cabin furnished with marble and brass fittings, wherein was a full-sized bath. I took a bath, and found him waiting for me when I had finished. We returned to the scarlet room, and there spread upon the table was a meal worthy of Delmonico's. There was coffee served with thick cream; there were choice dishes of meat, game pies, new rolls, fruit, and the whole was finished with leas and bon-bons in the true American fashion. My new friend, the doctor, said nothing as I ate; but when the repast was removed he began to talk at once.

"I regret," he said, "that I cannot supply you with a morning newspaper; the latest journal that I can lend you is a copy of Saturday last. There is a passage in it which may interest you."

The paper was folded and marked in a certain spot. I read it with blank amazement, for it was a full account of the nameless ship's attack upon the American cruiser and the Ocean King. The matter was the subject of a profound sensation, not only in America, but throughout the world. The Chilean government had been approached at once, but had repudiated all knowledge of the mysterious ship. Meanwhile war vessels from England, America and from France had set out to scour the seas and bring such intelligence as they could. The whole account concluded with the rumor that a gentleman in New York had knowledge of the affair and would at once be interviewed.

"You see that interview was unfortunately interrupted," said the doctor. "You are the gentleman with the full particulars. I am here to ask you to write accurately for us a complete account of every step you have taken in this matter since you were fool enough to follow Martin Hall."

"And otherwise?"

"Otherwise, you would give all you possessed if I would shoot you now as you sit. If you would still have life, not altogether under unfavorable conditions, you have but to ask for pen, ink and paper—and to make yourself one of us."

"That I will never do!"

"Oh, you say that now; but we shall give you some days to think of it. Let me advise you to be a man of common sense, and not run your head against a stone wall. We are now bound on a four-days' voyage. During these four days, you need fear nothing. So don't disturb yourself unnecessarily until Captain Black puts the question to you."

(To be continued.)

Righting a Wrong.

Miggles—I understand you told Hyker that I was a fool.

Wiggles—Never told him anything of the kind. I merely said that if I were you and got a glimpse of the fool-killer coming up the street I'd dodge up an alley.

Judicial Wisdom.

"No," said the gray-haired Judge, "I'm not in favor of women on juries."

"Why not?" queried the young lawyer.

"Because," answered the venerable Judge, "we have too many disagreements as it is."

Outclassed.

She had just handed him the frigid mitt.

"Then I have a rival, eh?" he queried.

"Hardly that," she replied. "You are not in it with the other party."

Sounds That Way.

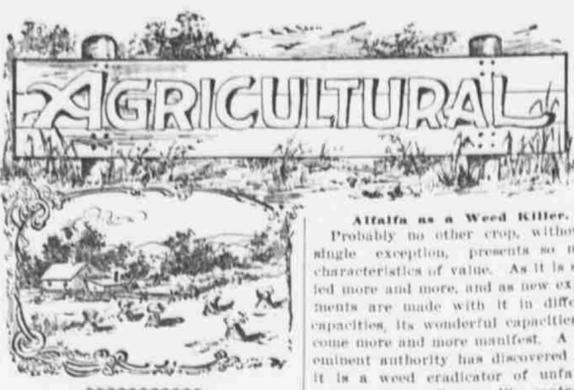
Hicks—I see one of our clergymen has declared that there is more sin in Boston than in any other city in the country.

Wicks—He's wrong. There's more sin in Cin-cinnati.—Boston Transcript.

Too Wide.

Kind Lady—My poor man, your coat is full of rents. Here is a needle and thread.

Gritty George—No use, mum. Dem rents are too big to be collected.



Annual Losses Due to Insects.

If the power of the mosquito had not been proved to us beyond a doubt, we would be inclined to regard the estimate of \$700,000,000 annual loss to our farming interests caused by insects, which has been made by the Department of Agriculture as too startling to be true. The following table shows the basis of the calculation:

Annual Value of Loss.

Products.	Annual Value.	P. C. of Loss.	Amount of Loss.
Cereals	\$2,000,000,000	10	\$200,000,000
Hay	500,000,000	10	50,000,000
Cotton	600,000,000	10	60,000,000
Tobacco	25,000,000	10	2,500,000
Truck crops	200,000,000	20	40,000,000
Sugars	50,000,000	10	5,000,000
Fruits	150,000,000	20	30,000,000
Farm forests	110,000,000	10	11,000,000
Miscellaneous crops	50,000,000	10	5,000,000
Animal products	1,750,000,000	10	175,000,000
Total	\$5,551,000,000		\$595,100,000
Natural forests and forest products			100,000,000
Products in storage			100,000,000
Grand total			\$795,100,000

Such an immense sum being well worth the saving, the department has in its employ a large staff of men who are studying the life history of the pernicious insects to find out where they are vulnerable.

The work has been going on for some years and much progress has already been made. The cotton worm which formerly levied an annual tax of \$30,000,000 on the cotton crop, is now controlled by sprays; it has been proven that the ravages of the Russian fly which sometimes have reduced the wheat acreage in Ohio 40 per cent and in Indiana 60 per cent besides greatly impairing the yield of the remaining acreage, can be considerably checked by planting wheat at seasons when the fly is not so rapacious; the codling moth is controlled by arsenical sprays and \$20,000,000 worth of apples saved as a result.

The orange and lemon orchards of California have been relieved of the white scale which threatened to destroy them, by the importation from Australia of the ladybird, a natural enemy of the scale. Many other instances could be given of the wisdom of watching the insects.

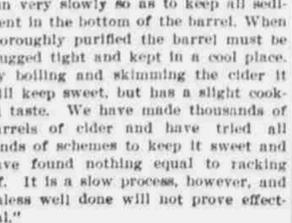
Cider-Making.

The Apple Specialist, in answer to an inquiry, gives the following instructions how to make cider and keep it sweet:

"In order to make cider the juice must be extracted from the apples. This is done by grinding the apples into a pulice and thus pressing the juice out. The pulice is laid up in hoops and held in place by old sacking made by ripping gunny sacks. It is laid up in cheese form, one above the other, and pressure applied at the top. The cider works out through the sacking and is caught in a tub. Hand cider mills are made that are excellent for the work, and sweet cider may be had at any time. There is no way to keep cider sweet without racking it off, drawing it from one barrel to another several times, letting it run through several thicknesses of flannel to take out the sediment. It must be allowed to run very slowly so as to keep all sediment in the bottom of the barrel. When thoroughly purified the barrel must be plugged tight and kept in a cool place. By boiling and skimming the cider it will keep sweet, but has a slight cooked taste. We have made thousands of barrels of cider and have tried all kinds of schemes to keep it sweet and have found nothing equal to racking off. It is a slow process, however, and unless well done will not prove effectual."

Four-Row Corn Marker.

The following suggestion, which seems a good one, comes from a farmer who has built and used one. He says: "This will make four marks at a time on ridges or in furrows. To turn at the



FOUR-ROW MARKER.

end of row, pull gang pole out of hole, lay it back, fold up outside runners, and you have just two runners to turn, the same as an ordinary sled. The sketch will clearly show the construction of the marker. On stumpy ground, raise the outside runners as when turning, and go right along.

Farm Notes.

One-fourth of the dairy cows of the country do not pay for their feed, and more than half of them do not return any profit.

In nine months 4,184,181 dozen eggs, valued at \$865,437, were exported from the United States, double the number sent out during the same period last year.

FORT M'HENRY SAFE.

Abandoned by Federal Army, Maryland Preserves It.

Ever since it was announced that Fort McHenry, in Chesapeake Bay is to be abandoned by the United States Army much regret has been expressed that a place with which is associated one of the inspiring events of our history and which gave birth to our national anthem should fall into ruin. Happily, such a fate is spared the old Baltimore fort.



FRANCIS SCOTT KEY.

The National Guard of Maryland will take possession when Uncle Sam's soldiers step out and will use the fort as a drill ground and storehouse. The old guns and relics will remain. The Stars and Stripes will continue to float from the old ramparts as they did on that memorable September morning in 1814 when the rising sun, piercing the smoke of battle during the bombardment of the fort by the British, disclosed them to the delighted view of Key, inspired on one of the British warships, and inspired him to write The Star Spangled Banner.

The second war of America against the mother country was in progress. An English army had invaded and occupied Washington, and had burned the national capital. The British were massing their land and sea forces for other conquests, and as the fleet sailed down the Potomac, Dr. William Beanes, a prominent citizen of Maryland, who had been arrested in his home in Upper



HISTORIC FORT M'HENRY.

Marlboro, charged with some petty offense, was carried off a prisoner.

It was to secure the liberation of his friend and neighbor that Francis Scott Key obtained leave of the President to go to the British admiral, under a flag of truce. He found the British fleet at the mouth of the Potomac.

After considerable parleying, it was finally determined that Dr. Beanes should be released, but as an advance on Baltimore was about to be made, it was required that the Americans should remain under guard on board their own vessel until morning. That night, Sept. 14, 1814, Key witnessed the bombardment of Fort McHenry.

For long hours the cannonading continued. Suddenly it ceased; there was no way for the impatient Americans to tell whether the fort had surrendered or whether the British had found the bombardment in vain. They strained their eyes, waiting for morning to disclose whether or not the star-spangled banner was still floating on the ramparts of Fort McHenry.

When the blessed morning light disclosed the flag still erect, Key, in an outburst of enthusiasm, dashed off his poem, writing it on the back of an envelope.

Things We Get from the Hog.

The hog is a wonderful animal when you come to sum him up and is one of the fixed institutions of this country. Someone once wittily described him as a manufacturer of hams, lard, hair brushes, head cheese, toothbrushes, glue, buttons, fertilizer, fats, bacon, knife handles, whistles, soaps, sausage and satisfaction. As a condenser, he beats the finest steam machinery. He will put ten bushels of corn into less space than a bushel measure. Corn loaned to a hog is cash at a good investment, safe and at a large interest. He does what the ancient alchemists never succeeded in doing by converting corn into coin, and thus discovers the philosopher's stone.

Case of Deceptive Appearances.

"Well," said the new reporter at the creditors' meeting, "it's easy enough to pick out the bankrupt."

"Think so?" replied the older one.

"Yes; see how shabby and careworn he looks."

"That's the principal creditor. The bankrupt is that man with the fur overcoat and diamonds."—Philadelphia Press.

Uplifting the Public.

Tim—There goes a man who has done much to arouse the people.

Blm—Great labor agitator, I suppose?

Tim—Now; alarm clock manufacturer.—New York Times.

How a Mighty Mind Rests.

Let us pour a libation to croquet—a sport of young and old, innocent, simple, accessible like playing with the cat, and, like that exercise, an escape into a world of revelry that is calm.—Collier's Weekly.

The average woman can get an awfully big headache in having an awfully little good time.

Nothing interests a woman more than a man who refuses to explain things.