

# THE IRON PIRATE

A Plain Tale of Strange  
Happenings on the Sea

By MAX PEMBERTON

## CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

The helm went over, and the yacht loomed up black, as our own light died away; and passed us within a cable's length. What lift of the night there was showed us her decks again; but they were not deserted, for as one or two aboard gave a great cry, I saw the white and horribly distorted face of a man who clung to the main shrouds—and he alone was the guardian of the wanderer.

That vision of the man I had left well and hopeful and strong not three days since was terrible to me. A brave man had gone to his death, but to what a death, if that agonized face and distorted visage betokened aught! And I had promised to aid him, and was drifting there with the schooner, raising no hand to give him help.

"Skipper," I cried, "this time we'll risk getting a boat off; I'm going aboard that vessel now, if I drown before I return." Then I turned to the men and said: "You saw the yacht pass just now, and you saw that man aboard her—he's my friend, and I'm going to fetch him."

As the good fellows gave way and our boat rode easily before the wind, I noticed for the first time that the clouds were scattering; and we had not made another cable's length when a great cloud above us showed silver at its edges, and opaquely white in its center, through which the moon shone. Anon it dissolved, and the transformation on the surface of the water was a transformation from the dark of storm to the chrome light of a summer moon. The deserted yacht was beating up to us, and we stood right in her track.

"Get a grapple forward, and look out there," cried the man in command.

As if to help us, the wind fell away as the schooner came up, and she began to shake her sails. Suddenly there was the sound as of fierce contest, of the bursting of wood, and the spread of flame; and in that instant the decks of the yacht were ripped up, and sheets of fire rose from them to the rigging above.

"Give way," roared Dan again, for the men sat motionless with terror. "Are you going to let him burn?"

The words awed them. They shot the long boat forward; and I stood in her stern to observe, if I could, what passed on the burning decks. And I saw a sight the like to which I pray that I may never see again. Martin Hall stood at the main shrouds, motionless, volumes of flame around him, his figure clear to be viewed by that awful beacon.

"Why doesn't he jump it?" I called aloud. But Martin Hall never moved, his gaunt figure was motionless—the flames beat upon it, it did not stir; and we drew near enough anon and knew the worst.

"He's lashed there—and he's dead," said Dan. "Easy! for a parcel of stark fools! Would you run alongside her?"

There they lay, for any nearer approach would have been perilous, and even in that place where we were, twenty feet on the windward side, the heat was high unbearable. So near were we that I looked close as it might be into the dead face of Martin Hall, and saw that the fiends who had lashed him there had done their work too well. But I hoped in my heart that he had been dead when the end of the ship had begun to come, and that it were no reproach to me that he had perished; for to save his body from that holocaust was work no man might do.

So did we watch the mounting fire, and the last tack of the yacht *La France*. Scaudly she raised her head to a new breeze, shook her great sail of flame in the night, and scattered red light about her. Then she dipped her burning jib as if in salute, and there was darkness.

As we neared our own ship *Roderick* took my hand, giving it a great grip. Then we came aboard, where Mary waited for us with a white face, and the others stood silent; but we said nothing to them, going below. There I locked myself in my own cabin, and though fatigue lay heavy on me, I took Martin Hall's papers from my locker and lighted the lamp to read them through.

But not without awe, for they were a message from the dead.

## CHAPTER V.

The manuscript, which was sealed on its cover in many places, consisted of several pages of close writing, and of sketches and scraps from newspapers—Italian, French and English. The sketches I looked at first, and was not a little surprised to see that one of them was the portrait of the man known as "Roaring John," and there was with it a blurred and faint outline of the features of the seaman called "Four-Eyes." But what, perhaps, was even more difficult to understand was the picture of the great hull of what I judged to be a warship, showing her a-building, with the work yet progressing on her decks. The newspaper cuttings I deemed to be in some part an explanation of these sketches, for one of them gave a description of a very noteworthy battleship, constructed for a South American republic, but in much secrecy.

All this reading remained enigmatical, of course, and as I could make nothing of it to connect it with the events I have narrated, I went on to the writing, which was fine and small, as the writing of an

exact man. And the words upon the head of it were these:  
SOME ACCOUNT OF A NAMELESS WARSHIP.  
OF HER CREW, AND HER PURPOSE.

Written for the eyes of Mark Strong, by  
Martin Hall, sometime his friend.

From that place the story was in great part autobiographical. It was, as you shall see, the simple narration of a man sincere in his dreaming, if he did dream; logical in his madness, if he were mad. And this was his story as first I read it:

"I was born in Liverpool thirty-three years ago, and was educated for a few years at the well-known institute in that city. They taught me there that consciousness of ignorance which is half an education; and being the son of a man who starved on a fine ability for modelling things in clay, and plaster moulding, I went out presently to make my living. First to America, to get the experience of coming home again; then to the Cape, to watch other men dig diamonds; to Rome, to Naples, to Genoa, that I might know what it was to want food; to South America as an able seaman; to Australia in the stoke-hole of a South Sea liner; home again to my poor father, who lay dead when I reached Liverpool.

"I was twenty-two years old then, and gluttoned with life. By what chance it I cannot tell, but I drifted like a living log into the detective force of my city, and after working up for a few years through the grades, they put me on the landing-stage at Liverpool, to watch for men who wished to emigrate. It was miserable employment, but educating, for it taught me to read faces that were disguised, old men become beardless, young men made old. I suppose I had more than common success, for when I had been so employed for five years I was sent to London by our people, and there commanded to go to the Admiralty and get new instructions. Regard this, please, as the first mark in this record I am making. Of my work for our own people I may not tell even you, since I engaged upon it under solemn bond of secrecy; but I can indicate that I was sent to Italy to pick up facts in the dock yards there, and that our people relied on my gifts of disguise, and on my knowledge of Italian. In short, I was expected to provide plans and accounts of many things material to our own service, and I entered on the business with alacrity, gained admittance to the public dock yards, and knew in a twelvemonth all that any man could learn who had his wits only to guide him.

It was in Italy during my second year of work that I had cause to be at Spezia, inspecting there a new type of gunboat about which there was much talk and many opinions. It was an evening late in the year, and the sun was just setting. I watched the changing hues of the peaks as the light spread from point to point upon the castle roof, upon the steel hulls of great ships. And then I saw a strange thing, for amongst all the vessels I saw one that stood out beyond them all, a great globe, not of silver, but of golden fire. There was no doubt about it at all; I rubbed my eyes, I used the glass I always carried with me; I viewed the hull I saw lying there from half a dozen heights; and I was sure that what I saw was no effect of evening light or strange refraction. The ship I looked on was built either of brass, or of some alloy of brass, as it seemed to me, for the notion that she could be plated with gold was preposterous; and yet the more I examined her, the more clearly did I make out that her hull was constructed of a metal infinitely gold-like, and of so beautiful a color in the reddened stream which shone upon it that the whole ship had the aspect of a mirror of the purest gold I had ever seen.

The dark fell. I returned to the town quickly. I went straight to the sea front and began, if I could, to find where the water lay wherein this extraordinary steamer was docked. I had taken the bearings of it from the hills, and I was very quickly at that spot where I thought to have seen the strange vessel. There, truly enough, was a dock in which two small coasting steamers were moored, but of a sign of that which I sought there was none. I should have had the matter out there and then, searching the place to its extremity; but I had not been at my work ten minutes when I knew that I was watched. A man, dressed as a rough sailor, and remarkable for the hideousness of his face and a curious malformation of one tooth, lurked behind the heaps of sea lumber, and followed me from point to point. I returned in a good disguise of a common English seaman on the following evening, and again entered the dock yard. The same man was watching, but he had no suspicion of me.

"Any job going?" I asked, and the question seemed to interest him.

"I reckon that depends on the man," he replied, sticking his hands deep into his pockets. "What's a little wizen chap like you good for, except to get yer neck broken?"

"All in my line," I answered jauntily, having fixed my plan; "I'm starving amongst these cutthroats here, and I'm ready for anything."

I chatted with him, and later on with his companions, about as fine a dozen of self-stamped rascals as ever I wish to see. Next day, I came again to the dock

yards, convinced that I was at the foot of a mystery, and, to my delight, I got employment from the chief of the gang, named 'Roaring John' by his friends; and was soon at work on the simple and matter-of-fact business of cutting planks. This gave me an entry to the dock yard—all I wished at the moment.

"I had got admission to the dock, but had learnt nothing of the vessel. I was admitted only to the outer basin, where the coasting steamers lay, and 'Roaring John' threatened me if I passed the gate which opened into the dock beyond. Minute by minute and hour by hour, I waited my opportunity. It came to me on the morning of the eighth day, when I reached the yard at four o'clock; and the gate being unopen, I lurked in hiding until the first man should come. He was no other than the one who had engaged me; and when he had gone in he did not close the second door after him, there being no men then at their work. I need not tell you that I used my eyes well in those minutes. There, sure enough, lay the most remarkable warship I had ever beheld—a great, well-armed cruiser, whose decks were bright with quick-firing guns, whose lines showed novelty in every inch of them. More remarkable than anything, however, was the confirmation of that which I had seen from the hills. The ship, seemingly, was built of the purest gold. This, of course, I knew could not be; but as the sun got up and his light fell on the vessel, I thought that I had never seen a more glorious sight. She shone with the refulgent beauty of a thousand mirrors; every foot of her deck, of her turrets, of her upper house made a sheen of dazzling fire; the points of her deck lights were as beacons, all lurid and a-gold. So marvellous, truly, was her aspect, that I forgot all else but it, and stood entranced, marvelling, forgetful of myself and purpose. The flash of a knife in the air brought me to my senses to know that I was in the grasp of the man 'Roaring John'.

A bad mishap befell me. The best of my disguise was the thick, bushy black hair I wore about my face. As the ruffian went to take a firmer hold of my collar, he pulled aside a portion of my beard, and left my chin clean shaven beneath as naturally it was. The intense surprise of this discovery seemed to hit him like a blow. He stepped back with a murderous look in his eyes. But I cheated him, and, turning on my heel, I fled with all the speed I possessed, and got into the street with twenty ruffians at my heels, and a hue and cry such as I hope never to hear again.

"The escape was clever. I reached my hotel. I was sure that I had cut off all hope of returning to the yard; and what information I was to get must come by other modes. The nature of these I knew not, but I was determined to set out upon a visit to Signor Vezzina, who was the builder to whom the docks wherein I worked belonged. To him I came as the pretended agent of a shipping firm in New York, with whom I had some little acquaintance, and he gave me audience readily. He was very willing to hear me when he learned that I was in quest of a builder to lay down steamers for the American trade with Italy; and some while we passed in great cordiality, so I ventured the other business.

"By the by, Signor Vezzina, that's a marvellous battleship you have in your second dock; I have never seen anything like her before."

"I spoke the words, and read him as one reads a barometer. He shrank visibly into his bulb, and the tone of his conversation marked a storm. I heard him mutter under his breath, and then the mercury of his conversation mounted quickly.

"Yes, yes; a curious vessel, quite a special thing, for a South American republic, an idea of theirs—but you will extend me the favor of your pardon, I am busy"—and in his excitement he put his spectacles off and on, and called 'Giovanni, Giovanni!' to his head clerk, who made business to be rid of me. I mounted to my hill top again; and spent the morning looking down upon the golden ship which was built for 'a South American republic.' That tale I never believed, for the man's face marked it a lie as he gave it to me. I resolved in that hour to devote myself heart and soul to the work of unravelling the slender threads, even if I lost my common employment in the business. The reverie held me long. I was roused from it by the sight of a dull vapor mounting from the funnel of the nameless ship. She was going to sail then—at the next tide she might leave Spezia, and there would be no more hope. I hurried to my hotel.

"Here was a problem at this stage as it then appeared to me: Item (1), A ship built of some metal I had no knowledge of. Item (2), A ship that shone like a rich sunset on a garden lake. Item (3), A ship that was armed to the full, as a casual glance told me, with every kind of quick-firing gun, and with two ten-inch guns in her turret. Item (4), A ruffianly blackguard, to whom the cutting of a throat seemed meat and drink, with ten other rogues no less deserving, from a murderous point of view, put to watch about the ship that no strange eye might look upon her. Item (5), The confusion of Signor Vezzina, who made a fine tale and said at the same time with his eyes, 'This is a lie, and bad one; I'm sorry that I have nothing better ready.' Item (6), My own adamant conviction that I stood near by some mystery, which was about to be a big mystery, and which would pay me to pursue. Instinct told me to go on in this work, if I lost all other, if I starved, if I drowned, if I died at it. And to go on I meant.

(To be continued.)

Years ago the French government offered 300,000 francs (\$500,000) to any one who would give a remedy for the phylloxera, but the prize has never been awarded, because no remedy has been discovered. It is easy enough to kill the pest with a poisonous spray, but that same spray kills the grape also.

# FARMS AND FARMERS

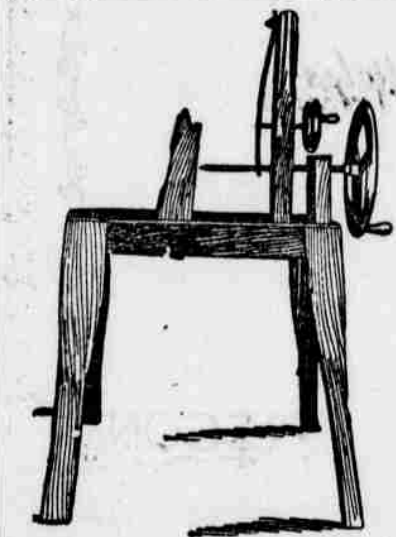


## Home-Made Drill.

On our farm we have a shop for repairing machinery. It is an essential factor in farm management to be able to repair breakages and keep the machinery in good working condition, writes a contributor in Orange Judd Farmer.

The accompanying illustration shows a drill made to drill holes for repairing purposes. This machine will drill a hole through steel or wrought iron as quickly as a drill we have that cost several dollars. The main piece upon which the drill rests is a 4 by 4 2 feet 6 inches long mounted upon four legs made of oak 2 by 4 materials. The legs are worked down to two inches square at the bottom to secure neatness and make the drill as light as possible.

The main standard is a 2 by 4 two feet high mortised into the main 4 by 4. The stub standard is also a 2 by 4 eight inches high and mortised in the same 4 by 4 an inch from the end and two and a half inches from the main standard. The shaft to which the large wheel is attached is a three-quarter-inch bolt fifteen inches long. At the head a hole is drilled into the bolt, beveled and then squared in order that the



HOME-MADE DRILL.

drill may be securely held. To feed the drill a steel spring sixteen inches long is bolted to the top of the main standard and attached to the drill bolt by a slot in the spring. The small wheel attached to a threaded bolt does the feeding. The piece upon which the pressure is put while drilling is a 4 by 4 mortised into the main 4 by 4 in the form of a sliding slot in order that any distance can be procured according to the size of the iron intended to be drilled. A bolt passes through this piece from underneath the 4 by 4. By loosening the bolt it can be moved to any required distance.

## The General Purpose Farm Horse.

Very many of our farmers get the idea that all they have to do is to breed their nondescript mares to the leggy, coarse type of so called coach horses being peddled through the country to get the general purpose farm horse. I have seen hundreds of colts from this kind of breeding and must say that not 5 per cent of them are even fair specimens of the general purpose horse, while 50 per cent or more are failures from every point of view.

I have seen much better results where the coach stallion has been a finer and more compactly built one or where a hackney or American trotter of a compact, smooth, muscular type has been the sire. These observations have led me to the conclusion that this latter plan is the surest one to bring some measure of success in producing the general purpose farm horse.—Geo. McKerrrow, Wisconsin.

## Oats for Hogs.

Oats may be a portion of a ration for hogs, but they are much more satisfactory if they are ground. Mixed with corn, oats and shorts, they add materially to the value of any hog feed. They should not constitute more than one-fourth of the grain ration. A mixture of oats and peas ground and fed as a sylvil is exceedingly valuable.—American Agriculturist.

## Caring for Turkeys.

The young turkeys suffer more than do other fowls at this season of the year if they are not looked after and carefully fed. The supply of nature's food which so largely sustains them during the summer and early fall begins to dwindle and lessen with each coming day. The young turkeys and the old turkeys as well should be plentifully provided with a grain supply to guarantee their continued growth without being stunted or retarded when they should be growing every day.—Country Gentleman.

## Value of a Good Cow.

What are the cows worth that produce 400 pounds of butter per annum? Here I am going to make a statement and undertake to prove it correct, says a writer in *Successful Farming*. When a cow that produces 200 pounds of butter per annum at a food cost of \$39 and a labor cost of \$12.50 is worth \$35, the cow that produces 400 pounds of butter annually is worth \$400, and the owner can make net \$16 more from her after paying interest on the \$400 than he can from the cows that produce 200 pounds of butter. There is no more labor connected with the 400-pound cows than there is with the 200-pound cows. The price at which butter has been credited, namely, 20 cents a pound, is the net price from the creamery after the making has been paid for. In this herd the increased cost of feed for the 400-pound cows was more than offset by the increased amount of skim milk, so we have the 200 pounds increase of butter as net profit over the 200-pound cow. Two hundred pounds of butter at 20 cents is \$40. We have \$400 invested in these cows, which at 6 per cent interest is \$24, which we will deduct from the \$40, and we have left \$16 to the credit of the 400-pound cow.

## The Fall Plowing.

The question of fall plowing is a debatable one in the minds of most farmers. The practice seems to grow more common upon trial in some neighborhoods and to fall into almost total disfavor in other sections. Upon the rolling lands which are so common there is little question that it is justly condemned, if, indeed, it is good practice anywhere, says an exchange. Some loss of plant food from washing and blowing of the surface soil upon fall-plowed ground is inevitable, although its mechanical condition may be improved somewhat by the action of the frost upon the freshly plowed ground. Of course, the condition of the labor market affects the amount of fall plowing undertaken or accomplished to a very considerable degree, but independently of any and all of the factors mentioned, fall plowing may be expedient in some cases. The writer has done very little fall plowing during recent years, but this year the plow will be kept going as long as the weather will permit after the crops are all secured.

## Best Not to Sell Early.

For years farmers have been growing sheep in a small way, and generally have sold their lambs when they weigh 60 to 70 pounds for from \$2 to \$2.50 each. Even at these prices one makes a nice profit out of his sheep. It has cost little to grow them and so he is well paid, but it is possible to do better. For several years Western lambs weighing from 50 to 60 pounds have sold at from \$2 to \$2.50, and after being fed sixty or ninety days, or up to 80 to 90 pounds, they sell for almost twice as much. As a rule the farmers who sell the young lambs have feed enough to finish them and get the additional price. Although this extra feed had to be bought at market prices there would be no loss, for feeders are buying both sheep and feed and making a profit. More profit is made from farm products when animals are properly finished, and lambs are in this class.

## Saltin' the Butter.

For those who prefer to salt out of the churn the following is the best method: Remove the butter when in the granular state, weigh it and place it upon the worker, spread evenly and salt to suit the taste. Sift the salt evenly over the butter, pass the worker over it, then run the butter and work again or until the salt is thoroughly worked in. It may then be set away for a few hours, after which it should be given a second working.—American Cultivator.

## Chemical Weed Killer.

A chemical weed killer has been developed or tested by the Wisconsin experiment station in attempts to kill wild mustard, cocklebur, yellow dock, etc. The peculiar thing claimed for this poison is that when sprayed on a growing grain crop infested by weeds it kills the weeds without injury to the cultivated crop. The solution used consists of 100 pounds of iron sulphate dissolved in fifty-four gallons of water, which amount will spray an acre.

## Kill Free Seed Distribution.

The free seed distribution by the government costs \$242,000 a year, besides the cost of handling in the mails, which costs about as much more, or half a million dollars a year, total. This sum of money wisely used would teach farmers the correct plan to market and build the machine for marketing, which will compel a profitable price for every farm crop grown anywhere in the country. The machine once built will not cost the farmers anything directly to run it, but will pay great dividends every year.—Up-to-Date Farming.