

Story of the Alabama

There is living today at Kyleakin, the only Scotsman who was one of the crew of the historic Alabama, up to the night preceding the day she was destroyed by the Kearsarge off Cherbourg in France on the 19th June 1864. The story of the Alabama is one of the most exciting episodes of the American civil war. The Alabama was a wooden screw steam vessel built at Birkenhead in 1862 for the Confederates. The British Government were so slow in acting upon the information of the American Ambassador that the vessel left on the day fixed for her seizure, proceeded to the Azores, took on guns, ammunition, and stores, received her commander, Capt. Semmes on board, and was christened the Alabama. Up to that time the vessel was known simply by the number "290." After these preliminaries she entered upon her startling career of capturing and burning American ships in all parts of the world.

For two years the Alabama continued her destructive tactics and was sunk by the American Kearsarge on the date already stated. It was maintained by the Americans that their losses by the Alabama were due to British negligence, and the dispute was finally settled by arbitration in 1872 when a sum amounting to three and a half million sterling was awarded for damages done by the Alabama and two other privateer ships.

Captain Nicolson

Captain Nicolson, who resides in Kyleakin, is close upon 90 years of age. His experience as a sailor on the Alabama have in them the thrill of romance. I reproduce his narrative in his own words. "It was late in the winter of 1863. I was a sailor on board a ship named the Jabez Snow—Captain Snow. We loaded a general cargo at New York for Calcutta. A few days out we sighted smoke from a steamer. There was a dead calm and we could not make much headway with a sailing ship. We soon made out that the steamer was coming right in our track.

Nearer and nearer she came, and we soon made out that it was the much feared Alabama. You can understand the excitement that was caused among the men of our ship, and we all felt that whatever happened to ourselves, the Jabez Snow was doomed. At last the Alabama was within a hundred yards or so of us and she fired a shot across our bows. We immediately hove to. Resistance was out of the question. We could not fight, we had no guns, in fact no weapons of defence to put against the four or five guns of the Alabama. A boat from the privateer came alongside of us and in it was the famous commander of the Alabama—the bravest and most daring man I have known in 50 years of sea life.

Our captain saluted him and I remember him saying, "Well, Captain Semmes, I have been long looking for you and hoping never to set eyes on you." "I believe you," said the commander, "but strange things occasionally happen, and I suppose this meeting will be out of the usual routine of things in your life." This was said in the best of humor, and he came on board. He shook hands with our captain, and I confess that I felt proud when he took my own hand. Our captain and the commander walked backwards and forwards on deck for some time chatting away, and then all at once Captain Semmes shouted to his crew, "We must get to work men." And they did go to work with some purpose. They cleared us of all our stores—beef, pork, flour, and everything in the shape of victuals that was on board. The ship was next searched, and anything that would yield money was appropriated.

Ordered to Quit

Captain Semmes then ordered the crew of the Jabez Snow to get ready to quit the ship. We were allowed a bag but no chest in which to stow our clothing. When we all stood upon deck, each man with everything he possessed in the bag, one of our boats was lowered, and in a few minutes we were on board the Alabama. A number of the Alabama crew then boarded our vessel, emptied a barrel of tar on the decks. On the top of the tar a tin layer of oakum was placed, and shortly afterwards we saw from the deck of the Alabama our good ship enveloped in dense smoke, and then huge tongues of flame spouting forth. In half an hour the Jabez Snow had gone to the bottom. We were treated well on the Alabama. I remember that among the things taken from our ship were two chronometers—one the property of the owner of the ship, the other belonging to Captain Snow. Captain Semmes appropriated the owner's, and I remember him handing back to Captain Snow his own chronometer.

Perhaps about a week after we were on board the Alabama we made one of the West Indian islands somewhere near Cuba. Captain Semmes brought our crew together on deck, and he pointed towards the island, saying, "You can have your choice of remaining on the Alabama, and sharing our luck, or take your own boat and land upon the island, and make the best of it. Some of our crew went ashore on the island, but I elected to remain. Several years afterwards I met one of our old crew, who had landed on the island, and he told me that they were attacked by negroes, deprived of their clothing, and barely escaped with their lives.

Capturing and Burning

They ultimately made Cuba of it. We began cruising about, with the Alabama harassing American ships, capturing and burning the maffer the manner in which the Jabez Snow was disposed of. We had some rough, wild times, and our crew were as tough a lot as ever sailed the seas. We had no set wages but shared in all the prizes that were taken.

When we had captured vessels and secured prizes requiring immediate disposal we went to Bermuda and Key West, both neutral ports, sold everything, and divided the proceeds.

At Charleston, Carolina, a steamer came off from the blockade and spoke to the Alabama. "What ship is this?" Captain Semmes replied, "An English sloop of war—the Spit Fire. Come on board. We'll be delighted to see you." The invitation was accepted, and when the steamer was half-way between the blockade runners and the Alabama Captain Semmes gave him a broadside, and sank the vessel. Immediately after this the blockade runners were after us, and the Alabama, which could do 18 knots, put on full speed. The next port that we made was Bermuda. We took everything from the Alabama that would sell and the proceeds, as usual, squarely divided. We got short of coal, and the next port we made was Cherbourg, in France, closely followed all the time by the blockade runners. At Cherbourg we availed ourselves of the chance of provisioning the ship, and got an abundant supply of coal. While in this port Captain Semmes received a letter, conveyed to him by a cutter in the English Channel. In the letter it was stated that the blockade runner Kearsarge was outside the harbor waiting for him.

The Last Fight

Was he game to fight? The authorities at Cherbourg intimated to Captain Semmes that his time was up, and that he must clear out of the harbor. It was a neutral port, and the authorities were afraid of trouble if the Alabama were allowed to remain. Captain Semmes replied by letter to the challenge of the commander of the Kearsarge, saying that he would fight him on the morrow. I was a Boston seaman, and in the war was on the other side to the Alabama. I knew the contents of the dispatch sent by Captain Semmes to the Kearsarge, and I knew, too, that he meant what he wrote.

I became suddenly ill. I ate a plug of tobacco and swallowed a piece of chalk. I became seemingly very ill, and looked like some ghost. The doctor of the Alabama asked me, "What is the matter with you, Nicolson?" "There is nothing the matter," I replied. He looked at my tongue, and then, turning to Captain Semmes, said, "This man cannot fight tomorrow; he is sick." The captain looked at me, and it was the last time I ever set eyes upon him, and he said, "Put him ashore," and I was sent ashore. The Alabama went out next day, met the Kearsarge, and after some hours hard fighting the Alabama went to the bottom. Captain Semmes was wounded, but quickly recovered. He was a bold and adventurous man, and held in much esteem by his crew.—The Scotsman.

CHARACTER ON YOUR LUGGAGE

The Paris Matin is this week exposing the manner in which the traveler has his character written on his luggage for the benefit of successive porters and hotel servants. The code recalls the signs that beggars are reputed to put on certain houses as signs for their fraternity.

In the case of the luggage little scratches or cuts are made on the bag. A cut on one of the upper corners is bad. It signifies that you are a bad customer. Your tips are very scanty. Whether you go to Paris or Versailles, to Dinard or Aix-les-Bains, the hotel waiters will at once spy the sign. You will be treated as a nobody and an encumbrance, a person to whom every self-respecting waiter is bound to be disagreeable.

If your bag or your box has a diagonal cut with a knife near one of the lower corners, the sign is still worse. You not only give scant tips, but you are exacting and disagreeable. Look out, then, how you will be treated. Your coffee will be served cold, and your wine or your beer will be hot. You will be charged with champagne of the first zone on your bill and served with champagne of the sixth or twelfth zone. On the other hand, a cross on one of the lower corners improves your situation. You are exacting, but generous. You will get what you ask for, but no attention will be paid to your remarks.

Small vertical lines cut near the lock are the best you can have. You are not exacting, and you are very generous. Waiters will stumble over each other in their haste to serve you. You will get the best room in the hotel, the best dishes at table, and a dozen invitations to return when you are leaving. Therefore, look carefully at your bag or box, and if it has no vertical lines near the lock, cut them in yourself and you will be happy on the continent.

The most deadly sign of all is a curved mark on the left-hand upper corner, which signifies "inexperienced, has not traveled much."

WAR DOGS TO SCENT BORDER AMBUSHES

For the first time trained dogs are to be used by a British force on active service. Two big and strong Airedales from Major Richardson's kennels are to accompany a punitive expedition on the Indian border to scent ambushes.

The expedition, consisting of a Ghoorka regiment, is to cross the Assam border to punish the Abor tribe for the murder of Mr. Noel Williamson and his party. Much of the country through which the Ghoorkas will have to pick their way in dense scrub, and these Airedales have been trained to utter a low growl to warn their friends of the vicinity of

strangers. They have the faculty of "winding" game or people over a mile away, and have been trained not to bark.

Although nearly all the continental countries, and Japan and the United States only, count among their military units a dog corps, our military authorities have held divided views as to the utility of these four-footed scouts, some officers contending that they would by barking disclose, not only the presence of an enemy, but also warn the enemy of attack.

Major Richardson, who has devoted much care and thought to the breeding and training of war, police, and watch dogs, stated in an interview in the Daily Telegraph that for many reasons his choice fell upon Airedales—not the show dog of that breed, but the larger and heavier old-fashioned type, which was strong, very plucky, not apt to be afraid of anything and not gun shy.

"The great advantage, in my opinion," said Major Richardson, "of a dog to a sentry or outpost picket is that at once the value of his services is more than doubled. A picket accompanied by a dog will never give a false alarm, and in the case of attack the approach of an enemy is noticed by the dog owing to its extraordinary keen sense of smell and sound long before the man has any definite idea of their presence."

"During the Matabele war a police patrol had turned in in their blankets for the night, leaving one of the number on guard. They had an old retriever with them. The night was very dark. The sentry saw and heard nothing, but the dog was restless and growled. Thinking something was wrong, the sentry roused his comrades. They were up, and had just prepared for an attack when a party of natives attempted to rush them. But for that dog that patrol would in all probability have been wiped out."

"It may interest you to learn," added Major Richardson, "that since the Borkum spy affair dogs patrol those fortified islands day and night."

DEALING IN MILLIONS

Interesting facts about the inside working of the Bank of England were given by Mr. Frederick Huth Jackson, a director of the bank, and a former president of the Bankers' Institute, in a lecture at the rooms of the Society of Arts. He said the original charter of incorporation of the Bank of England was granted in 1694, but it had been universally recognized that the real history of the bank as it was today dated from the Bank Charter Act of 1844, which was introduced and carried at the instance of Sir Robert Peel. Its practically exclusive right of issuing notes, he said, is one of the most important functions of the Bank of England. One rarely sees a dirty Bank of England note. That is because the bank never re-issues a banknote. Even if anyone went into the bank and demanded a five-pound note in exchange for five sovereigns, and then crossed to another counter and changed the same note back into gold, that note would be destroyed. This system is expensive, but it means the bank avoids many of the risks of forgery. The affairs of the Bank of England are conducted by a governor, a deputy-governor, elected from 24 directors, who are chosen from the leading merchant and private banking firms in the city and generally serve for life. There are two branches in London and nine in the country. The staff is about 1,000 strong, of whom 840 are at the head office. The bank also employs 500 porters and mechanics. Not only does the bank print in Threadneedle street its own notes and the India rupee notes, but also all postal orders and old-age pension orders. The chief criticism made nowadays against the Bank of England, Mr. Jackson said, is that its gold reserve is too small. It would certainly be more satisfactory if every note issued by the bank were backed by gold, but to keep such a reserve of gold lying idle would cost, at 3 per cent, £555,000 a year. The Bank of England already keeps a reserve in cash against all its liabilities of 40 to 50 per cent, and its duty to its shareholders prevents it from incurring this extra cost of a complete gold reserve. The chief circulating medium of this country is now, however, not banknotes but checks. Since 1868 the value of the checks that pass daily through the London Clearing House has risen from £11,000,000 to £48,000,000. In the same period the average value of the banknotes in circulation has only increased from £24,000,000 to £29,000,000, despite the enormous increase in the wealth and business transactions of the country in the same period. The bank issued notes in denominations of £5, £10, £20, £50, £100, £500 and £1,000. Of these by far the greater proportion was in £5 notes, and the proportion was always increasing.

GETTING EVEN

A collection was being taken up in a Scottish church one Sunday on behalf of the heathen. The minister made a stirring appeal, and the warden started his round with the box. One of the first members of the congregation to whom he offered it was evidently ill-disposed to the cause.

In a stage whisper, heard alike by congregation and pastor, this man said in blank vernacular—"Tak it awa', law. I'm no gaun to gie onnything."

At that period the collection boxes were taken direct into the vestry. Down came the preacher from the pulpit, went into the vestry, brought out one of the boxes, and marched straight toward the gentleman, all the congregation imagining that the minister was going to shame the unbeliever into giving something. The clergyman offered the box to the heretic with the naive remark—

"Take what you want; it has been gathered for the heathen!"

The Sands of Gold

From the remote village of Tolleshunt D'Arcy, Essex, comes a story as romantic as Stevenson's "Treasure Island"—a tale of a newly-discovered gold field in the far desolation of the Arctic Circle, and of a great coal field from which Europe may draw its fuel long after its own coal has been exhausted. There are three principal characters in this new "Treasure Island" story of real life. One is the Rev. Mr. Gardner, rector of Goldhanger, a sleepy little village of Essex whose greatest excitements have been a wedding, a birth, and a death. The second is Dr. J. H. Salter, of Tolleshunt D'Arcy, three miles from the rectory of Goldhanger. The third is Mr. Ernest Mansfield, a musician, a man of letters, a great traveler, and a mining engineer, who is the neighbor and friend of the rector and the doctor. Surely Stevenson or Quiller-Couch would have chosen just such men as these to be the characters in a story of gold and dead men's bones in a far-off island. After their day's work it was the habit of these three cronies to meet in one or other of their houses and to talk of their experiences in the world of fact and ideas, over a glass of wine. Both Mr. Mansfield and Dr. Salter are men who have hunted and explored in wild places, and the conversation of Mr. Mansfield was especially interesting, because, as a mining engineer, and one of the early pioneers of Klondike, he had searched for gold in many parts. Always his conversation came back to Gold, Gold, Gold, and the possibility of new discoveries. He held firmly to the theory that there were great gold deposits in the Arctic regions at present untouched by men. The Rev. Mr. Gardner was secretly fired by his words, and one day he said, "I am going to Spitzbergen. Perhaps while I am there I may put your theory to the test." So, acting upon the expert advice of his engineering friend, the Rev. Mr. Gardner brought back from his voyage pieces of quartz and rock, and specimens of sand, and mud, and shingle, from the Arctic coast. To him they were meaningless. He smiled as he thought of his strange baggage. But one night there was a thrilling sense of mystery and excitement when the three friends gathered in the sitting-room of the rectory. Mr. Mansfield pored over these pebbles and bits of rock, held them up to the light, and examined them closely. "Well?" said his friends. "Gold," he said, "or I'm a Dutchman." The specimens were sent to London to be tested. The report that came confirmed Mr. Mansfield's opinion. The sand brought back by the clergyman was what is known as pay gravel, washing down of a gold deposit. The three friends formed a private syndicate, and Mr. Mansfield went out to Spitzbergen to prospect more closely and take out a claim. He found that a party of Americans were further up the desolate coast, where they have pegged out their own claim and have now established a small township engaged in coal-digging with good results. The details of what Mr. Mansfield found must still be kept a secret, says Dr. Salter, although it can no longer be hidden that there are the

most astonishing indications of gold and an inexhaustible coal supply in this unexplored territory of the Frozen North. One great difficulty now faced the village pioneers. From whom were they to get the full right to take possession of minerals in this region? No flag of any nation flies over its barren rock. It is a "No Man's Land." Dr. Salter approached the Foreign Office and obtained certain advice, upon which he is now acting. Upon Mr. Mansfield's return money was raised with the help of private friends in the neighborhood, pledged to keep the secret. The syndicate have fitted out several ships, which have already made their way to the Arctic regions, and recently an iron-built vessel steamed out of the Thames bound for Spitzbergen, with a crew of English, Scottish and Norwegian sailors and miners. "They are tough men," says Dr. Salter, "carefully chosen and examined by myself—sturdy fellows with no nonsense about them and fit for a hard life. We have now a very flourishing little mining colony on our Arctic claim, strong enough to defend themselves in case of need and ready to enforce that mining law which means death to anybody who tries to jump a claim. The ships have taken out a great supply of provisions—and you have no idea how much is required to sustain a body of men utterly isolated from the world, and depending for their lives upon what they have carried with them. They have built houses taken out in pieces, and under the strict discipline of mining engineers and officers they are leading a hard, lonely life, with plenty of toil and no other society but their own. Around them they hear the barking voices of the seals who lie upon the rock ledges, polar bears prowling over this barren rock, and no human being outside their own camp disturbs the utter solitude. They keep close to their huts, for the Norwegians especially are superstitious and are afraid of the ghosts which they believe haunt these desert regions." One day, says the Chronicle, these pioneers in search of Arctic gold made a gruesome discovery. There on the naked rocks lay three skeletons. Their bones were bleached and stripped clean of flesh. There was no sign to show the race or character or history of the men who had perished in this Arctic solitude. These dead men's bones told no tales. Perhaps in the living flesh these men had come in that search for gold which has strewn many far regions and desert islands with skeletons. Three friends bound together upon some great adventure they lay now together in the fellowship of death, mourned, perhaps, in some English village. Spitzbergen is a group of rocky and icy islands, with some hundred of rock islets, far north of the northernmost cape of Europe (Norway), and partly within the Arctic Circle. They have never been permanently inhabited; only used as bases for exploring or fishing expeditions. It is an impossible, compared to which Klondike is a "liveable" area; but, if gold is to be found in quantities, no doubt the resources of the temperate zone will make even the everlasting ice plateaux and glacier-rasped valleys of Spitzbergen endurable.

A "FISHY" BUSINESS

A man with a large bundle of sporting papers went into a fried fish shop the other day, and asked how much he was to receive for them.

"Nothin'," snapped the owner of the shop. "Yer can tike 'em away; I don't want the likes on 'em in this establishment."

"Goin' to retire, Bill?" sneered the disappointed owner of the papers.

"Retire be blowed!" snorted Bill. "It's a matter o' business, that's all. It don't pay me to wrap up fish in sportin' papers. My customers reads 'em."

"Well, an' what then? Are yer afraid they'll be backin' the tips?"

"That's jist what I am afraid on," responded the purveyor. "They heats their bit o' fish, reads the tips, backs their fancy, an' drops their brass. Then they 'as ter starve for a week or two, an' my fish is left on my 'ands. Take them pipers away; they're no good to me."

BREAKING IT GENTLY

A lady who had recently moved to the suburbs was very fond of her first brood of chickens. Going out one afternoon, she left the household in charge of her eight-year-old boy. Before her return a thunderstorm came up. The youngster forgot the chicks during the storm, and was dismayed, after it passed, to find that half of them had been drowned. Though fearing the wrath to come, he thought best to make a clean breast of the calamity, rather than leave it to be discovered.

"Mamma," he said contritely, when his mother had returned; "mamma, six of the chickens are dead."

"Dead!" cried the mother. "Six! How did they die?"

The boy saw his chance.

"I think—I think they died happy," he said.

THEIR OWN INVENTION

The advertisements were the most interesting things in the paper, according to Mr. Hudson's ideas. He read them to his wife as she sat at work on the stockings of their active son.

"No need to spend your time hunting for antiques now," said Mr. Hudson, after skimming the cream from a long article, as was his wont. "Here's a man that will undertake and guarantee to make your new furniture look as

if 'twas a hundred years old, by a process known only to him."

"I don't see any need of processes for our furniture," remarked Mrs. Hudson, as she cast a hopeless stocking to the flames. "Tommy's feet are all the process we need. Perhaps we could rent him out by the day."

HIS FATHER'S GLASS EYE

"What's the matter, my lad?" an old gentleman asked of a youngster who was crying lustily in the street.

But the boy couldn't reply through his sobs.

"Please, sir," chimed in a companion, "we was playing marbles, and he's bin an' lost his glass alley."

"There, don't cry," exclaimed the old gentleman kindly. "Here's a penny, buy some more."

But the tears continued to flow.

"There, there," went on the benefactor; "I wouldn't cry any more if I were you."

"Ye-e-e-s, you w-o-o-uls," gasped the weeping one, "if you'd (sobs) lost yer father's glass eye."

BITTEN

William and Lawrence were in the habit of saving a part of their dessert from the evening dinner for consumption the next morning, and, in accordance with this custom, two small cakes had been placed in the pantry for them. William being the first up on the following morning and being hungry, went to the pantry. He found only one cake, and a large piece had been bitten out of that. Full of wrath, he went upstairs and roused his brother.

"I say!" he demanded. "I want to know who took that big bite out of my cake?"

"I did," sleepily answered Lawrence.

"What'd you do that for?"

"Well, when I tasted it I found it was your cake, and so I ate the other one."

HE COULDN'T HELP IT

"I would like mightily to enjoy riches." "Then why don't you try to marry 'em?" "As I said, I want to enjoy them."—Philadelphia Telegraph.

In proportion to its owner's weight a flying bird's wing is 20 times as strong as a man's arm.