THE SEA HAWK

By RAFAEL SABATINI.

CHAPTER XXVII. (continued)

He was answered by an old rover whom fear had rendered greatly daring.

"Thou liest," he answered. "Dragut is not trapped at Jerba."

"Thou liest," he answered. "Dragut is not trapped, for Dragut found a way out. And against Dragut there is as the whole navy of Genoa, whilst against us there is but one single galleon. By the Koran if she shows fight, have we no teeth? Will it be the first galleon whose decks we have over-run? But if ye prefer a coward's counsel, ye sons of shame, consider that once we take the open sea our discovery will be assured, and a corsaque hath told you that she carries twenty guns. I tell you that if we are to be attacked by her, best be attacked at close quarters, and I tell you that if we lie close and snug in here it is long odds that we shall never be attacked at all. That she has no inkling of our presence is proven since she has cast anchor round the headland. And consider that if we fly from a danger that doth not exist, and in our flight are so fortunate as not to render real that danger and to court it, we abandon a rich argosy that shall bring profit to us all.

"But I waste my breath in argument," he ended abruptly. "You have heard the commands of your lord, Asad-ed-Din, and that should be argument enough. No more of this, then."

Without so much as waiting to see them disperse from the rail and return to their lounging attitudes about the forecastle, he turned to Asad.

"It might have been well to hang the dog who spoke of Dragut and Jerba," he said. "But it was never in my nature to be harsh with those who follow me."

Asad from amazement had passed quickly to admiration and a sort of contrition, into which presently there crept a poisonous tinge of jealousy to see Sakr-el-Bahr prevail where he himself alone must utterly have failed. This jealousy spread all-pervadingly, like an oil stain. If he had come to bear ill-will to Sakr-el-Bahr before, that was turned of a sudden into hatred for one in whom he now beheld a usurper of the power and control that should reside in the Basha alone.

Therefore the words of commendation which had been rising to his lips froze there now that Sakr-el-Bahr and he stood face to face. In silence he considered his lieutenant through narrowing evil eyes, whose message none but a fool could have misunderstood.

Sakr-el-Bahr was not a fool, and he did not misunderstand it for a moment. He felt a tightening at the heart, and ill-will sprang to life within him responding to the call of that ill-will.

The conciliatory words he had in mind to speak he now suppressed. To that venomous glance he opposed his ever-ready mockery. He turned to Biskaine.

"Withdraw," he curtly bade him, "and take that stout sea-warrior with thee." And he indicated Marzak.

Biskaine turned to the Basha.

"It is thy wish, my lord?" he asked.

Asad nodded in silence, and motioned him away, together with the cowed Marzak.

"My lord," said Sakr-el-Bahr, when they were alone, "yesterday I made thee a proposal for the healing of this breach between us, and it was refused. But now, had I been the traitor and mutineer thou hast dubbed me, I could have taken full advantage of the humor of my corsairs. Had I done that, it need no longer have been mine to propose or to sue. Instead, it would have been mine to dictate. Since I have given thee such crowning proof of my loyalty, it is my hope and trust that I may be restored to the place I had lost in thy confidence, and that, this being so, thou wilt accede now to that proposal of mine concerning the Frankish woman yonder."

It was unfortunate, perhaps, that she should have been standing there, unveiled, upon the poop, within the range of Asad's glance; for the sight of her it may have been that overcame his momentary hesitation and stifled the caution which prompted him to accede.

"It is not for thee, Sakr-el-Bahr," he answered at length, "to make me proposals. To dare it proves thee far removed indeed from the loyalty thy lips profess. Thou knowest my will concerning her. Continue a barrier in my path at thy peril."

His voice shook with anger.

"Not so loud," said Sakr-el-Bahr, his eyes gleaming with a response of anger. "For, should my men overhear these threats of thine I will not answer for what may follow. I oppose thee at my peril, sayest thou? Be it so, then. It is war between us, Asad, since thou hast chosen it. Remember hereafter, when the consequences come to overwhelm thee, that the choice was thine."

"Thou mutinous dog!" blazed Asad.

Sakr-el-Bahr turned on his heel.

"Pursue the path of an old man's folly," he said it over his shoulder, "and see whither it will lead thee."

Upon that he strode away up the gangway to the poop, leaving the Basha alone with his anger and some slight fear evoked by that last bold menace. But, notwithstanding that he menaced boldly, the heart of Sakr-el-Bahr was surcharged with anxiety. He had conceived a plan, but between the conception and its execution he realized that much ill might lie.

"Mistress," he addressed Rosamund, "you are not wise to show yourself so openly."

To his amazement, she met him with a hostile glance.

"Not wise?" said she, her countenance scornful. "You mean that I may see more than was intended for me. What game do you play here, sir, that you tell me one thing and show me by your actions that you desire another?"

At once he perceived how she had misread the scene she had witnessed.

"I'll but remind you," he said very gravely, "that once before you did me a wrong by over-hasty judgment."

"But then—" she began.

"I do but ask you to save your judgment for the end. If I live I shall deliver you. Meanwhile, I beg you keep your cabin."

She looked at him, a prayer for explanation trembling on her lips. But, before the calm command of his tone and glance, she withdrew beyond the curtain.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
The Messenger.

For the rest of the day she kept the cabin, chafing with anxiety to know what was toward, and the more racked by it because Sakr-el-Bahr refrained through all those hours from coming to her. At last, towards evening, unable longer to contain herself, she went forth again, and, as it chanced, she did so at an untimely moment.

The sun had set, and the evening prayer was being recited aboard the galeasse, her crew all prostrate. Perceiving this, she drew back again instinctively, and remained screened by the curtain until the prayer was ended. Then, putting it aside, but without stepping past the Nubians, who were on guard, she saw that on her left Asad-ed-Din, with Marzak, Biskaine and one or two other officers, was again occupying the divan under the awning. Her eyes sought Sakr-el-Bahr, and presently they beheld him coming up the gangway with his long, swinging stride, in the wake of the boatswain's mates, who were doling out the meager evening meal to the slaves.

Suddenly he halted by Lionel, who occupied a seat at the head of his oar, immediately next to the gangway. He addressed him harshly in the lingua franca, which Lionel did not understand, and his words rang clearly and were heard—as he intended that they should be—by all upon the poop.

"Well, dog? How does galley-slave fare suit thy tender stomach?"

Lionel looked up at him.

"What are you saying?" he asked in English.

Sakr-el-Bahr bent over him, and his face, as all could see, was evil and mocking. No doubt he spoke to him in English also, but no more than a murmur reached the straining ears of Rosamund, though, from his countenance, she had no doubt of the purport of his words. And yet she was far indeed from a correct surmise. The mockery in his countenance was but a mask.

"Take no heed of my looks," he was saying. "I desire them up yonder to think that I abuse you. Look as a man would who were being abused. Cringe or snarl, but listen. Do you remember once when as lads we swam together from Penarrow to Trefusis Point?"

"What do you mean?" quoth Lionel, and the natural sullenness of his mien was all that Sakr-el-Bahr could have desired.

"I am wondering whether you could swim as far. If so, you might find a more appetizing supper awaiting you at the end—aboard Sir John Killigrew's ship. You have not heard? The Silver Heron is at anchor in the bay beyond that headland. If I afford you the means, could you swim to her, do you think?"

Lionel stared at him in profoundest amazement.

"Do you mock me?" he asked at length.

"Why should I mock you on such a matter?"

"Is it not to mock me to suggest a way for my deliverance?"

(To Be Continued)

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Dorothy Dix's Letter Box

Three Remedies for the Nagging Wife. Can a Cultured Girl Find Happiness With a Man Who Lacks Polish?—Shall He Marry for a Good Business Opportunity?

Dear Dorothy Dix—Several years ago I married an old maid. We are well mated as to tastes in books, amusements, etc., and she is an excellent housekeeper and cook. We have most of the luxuries of life and should be happy.

But my wife has a very peculiar disposition. She daily finds fault with her neighbors, her friends and her enemies, and is constantly reminding me of my shortcomings and of my past mistakes. It is most harassing, and when I try to reason her out of this habit she gets furious, and I have to take my curtain lecture in silence.

The worst feature of this nagging is that it grows on her as she grows older, and I am at my wits' end to know how to break the spell and change her disposition. I have dignity and cannot stand these petty family squabbles, and I shall be deeply grateful to you for any suggestions about how to handle the situation. HENPECKED HUSBAND.

Answer:

I fear that it is only in story books that people change their dispositions and the selfish become unselfish, the mean become kind, gentle and tender, and high-tempered turn meek and patient. In real life that miracle is seldom, if ever, wrought, because most of us are so self-conceited that we will never admit to a fault, so we have no chance of improving ourselves.

Of course, the perpetual fault-finder is suffering from a case of exaggerated ego, and it is an affliction that is common to both sexes. There are many men who knock everything their wives do, and probably just as many women who live with their little hammers in their hands. At the bottom of their trouble is the fixed conviction that they are the wisest people in the world and absolutely infallible, and that they know how to do everything better than anybody else.

The only cure for this is to reduce the swelling in their heads, and this is a well-nigh impossible thing to do.

Still, if I were a man who had drawn one of these naggers in the matrimonial lottery, I should try three remedies on her. First, I would make a little memorandum of every time she found fault with me and put down the exact terms of criticism she used. Then I would wait for the psychological moment in which she was calm and at peace with me, and I would present my little document to her.

The chances are that she would be surprised and horrified, for the nagger seldom realizes what she says. And I would follow up this by telling her how unhappy she made me, how she wounded me, and how she was killing my love for her. I would appeal to her affection for me and to her sense of fair play, and remind her that she also had weaknesses and flaws that I was too much of a gentleman to be continually throwing in her face. Furthermore, I would impress on her that the only way that two imperfect, faltering creatures can get along together is by mutual forbearance.

If that plan also went blah, I would deliver an ultimatum to the lady, and tell her that unless she could treat you with the same civility that she does a stranger, I would become a stranger to her and that I had listened to my last curtain lecture. Believe me, brother, few women desire to give up a good husband and a good home, and the fear of losing them will silence the most eloquent tongue. Also the domestic bullies, like every other bully, are cowards and you can always call their bluff.

The "Taming of the Shrew" is still good reading for henpecked husbands and furnishes much food for thought. DOROTHY DIX.

* * * *

Dear Miss Dix—Can a girl who is cultured and refined be happy with a good man who lacks polish? I care a great deal for a young man who is anxious for me to marry him, but I am hesitating because of that question.

He is good and kind and honest, but would his sometimes incorrect speech and his occasional social blunders get on my nerves if we were married? Of course, I cannot correct his mistakes now, but do you think he would resent it if I corrected them after marriage? Please tell me my chance for happiness in such a case? M. L. F.

Answer:

I should say it depended altogether on how broadminded you are, M. L. F., whether such a marriage would be a success or a failure.

Undoubtedly every woman is supersensitive about the appearance that her husband makes in public. Also every woman yearns to be married to a man of the world who knows how to wear his clothes and say just the right thing, and who can overawe head waiters and hand a woman into a taxi without chucking her in as if she were a sack of potatoes. And every woman writhes when her husband mispronounces words and is short on grammar and steps on other women's feet and doesn't know which spoon to use.

But, after all, these are not the important things. Kind hearts are more than fine manners and many a man who makes love like a matinee hero neglects and starves a woman after he has got her.

So, if you love a man who has not had advantages of education and association, marry him only if you have enough vision to see his good points instead of his failings, and if you have philosophy enough to laugh over them, instead of blushing over them.

But if you marry him, don't try to teach him table etiquette or correct his grammar. Take him "as is," as the shipping manifests say. No man marries to get a critic on the hearth, or desires a schoolma'am for a wife. If your husband has it in him to learn, he will pick things up by himself.

And remember that some of the most polished men in the world were once rough diamonds. DOROTHY DIX.

* * * *

Dear Dorothy Dix—I want to ask your advice about what to do under shellfire. I am a single man of thirty-one and have met a woman who is about forty-one, but who has never married. She is always talking to me about how much money she could make if she had an active young fellow like me for a partner. But she says we would have to get married, as that is the only way she would be sure I would be honest with her. This woman is always bragging about what a great and wonderful family she comes from until she bores me to death. I do not want to marry her, but it looks like a good business opening for me. What do you think? L. J. S.

Answer:

Fly, son, fly, while the flying is good. The highest board a man ever pays is when he marries for a home. If you marry this woman, you will be nothing but an errand boy who will have to work for his board and clothes for an employer, who bosses his every move inside and outside of working hours. DOROTHY DIX.

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