

The Diamond Derelict---Being the Record of a



Young Man Who Finally Won Out---By Edward Marshall

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CHAPTER XV.

A horse never knows how fast he can run till he gets a lick with a whip--The Log Book of The Lyddy.

THE fire barrier amidships cut the habitable portions of the Lydia Skolfeld's deck in two. A roaring veil of flames and smoke almost prevented Parton from even seeing the group of panic-stricken men who were gathered forward about the mate.

Whether or not the mate was aware of the dangerous quality of that dozen or two of cases which were stowed amidships, and which were entered on the ship's manifest as "chemicals," Parton did not know, but that there was wild fright in the tores in which the orders were given and wild haste in the way in which the men obeyed them there could be no doubt whatever. No attention at all was paid to the passenger who stood aft, before the cabin companionway, nor later to the sight of the two men who joined him there. Even as Parton watched through the smother of the smoke and the flashing of the fire, he saw that the men forward had lowered the boats upon both bows, and were tumbling rapidly over the ship's sides and into them with wild desperation.

At the stern of the Lydia Skolfeld were overhanging timbers from which the small boat hung when she lay in harbor; but one of the first duties after she had left port was to take this little craft aboard and house her on the cabin roof, just abaft the mizzen mast. She was canvas wrapped and closely lashed. Parton presumed that her oars were in her, having been placed beneath the thwart before she had been overturned and housed. He called to the two men to help him right her and get her overboard. They worked with a will, and soon had her swinging from the ship's low stern.

Both men were in her as Parton rushed below to get the captain, but even as he dashed down the companionway a change of wind brought a blinding gust of smoke and a sheet of flame across the narrow door, which made it difficult and dangerous for him to enter. He shielded his face and eyes as well as he could with his arm and plunged through the hot swirl. In the cabin there was no flame as yet, but the air had become so thick and foul with smoke that he could scarcely see, and every breath filled his lungs with stinging, choking vapor.

The men only partially dressed the captain, and, so far as Parton could judge from the hasty inspection of him which was possible in the desperate circumstances, he had become wholly lifeless. There was none of the babbling talk which had been such an uncanny feature of his prostration. The labored breathing which had alternately raised and lowered his great chest during the days that had passed since he was stricken had apparently ceased. When Parton placed his arms about him his body seemed limp and lifeless, and Parton shuddered as the thought came to him that the shock had killed him and that as he hurried from the cabin with him he was bearing in his arms a corpse.

When he reached the deck he was greeted by a blinding swirl of smoke, and red tongues of flame curled toward him through the murk threateningly. He could feel quick flashes over his face, and he knew that they meant that his beard and mustache had fallen victim to a razor more effective in its destruction than that which he had wielded that day in the Charing Cross hotel.

He was almost blinded, and the onslaught of the smoke made his eyes smart with an almost intolerable pain. For a second he was confused. He scarcely knew which way to turn to reach the vessel's stern. And even when he had reached there his state seemed scarcely better, for the low-hanging smoke mass so blinded him that he could not have located the boat even if the two sailors in it had been brave enough to hold her close to the blazing, smoking menace of the ship.

Parton hesitated only for a moment. He laid the captain down upon the deck. Then he wrenched the three gratings from the deck about the wheel. From the thwarts about the base of the mizzen mast he desperately caught a line, not stopping even to unlash it. He made the free end of it fast to the three gratings, passing it through their bars, and tying a most unseamanlike knot to secure it on the last one of the three. Then he cast them overboard.

By the time he had done this he was

almost incapable of sight, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he found the captain where he had laid him on the deck. The burning in his lungs, caused by the smoke which he had inhaled, impelled a constant and convulsive coughing, that weakened and racked him so that he could scarcely stagger to the rail with the captain's body in his arms. Once there, he precipitated himself from the ship with no definite effort at a spring. It was a merely random plunge, but it was all of which he was capable. For a second he felt himself, still with the captain tightly encircled by both arms, wholly immersed in the cool water of the ocean. When he rose to the surface his head struck what he knew must be one of the floating gratings

He struggled desperately to make his raft move more rapidly. Weariness was telling on him. He tried to shout, but could not. In the very midst of this crisis he heard cries close at hand and there popped out of the smoke close to him one of the ship's boats. It was the one of which the mate had taken command.

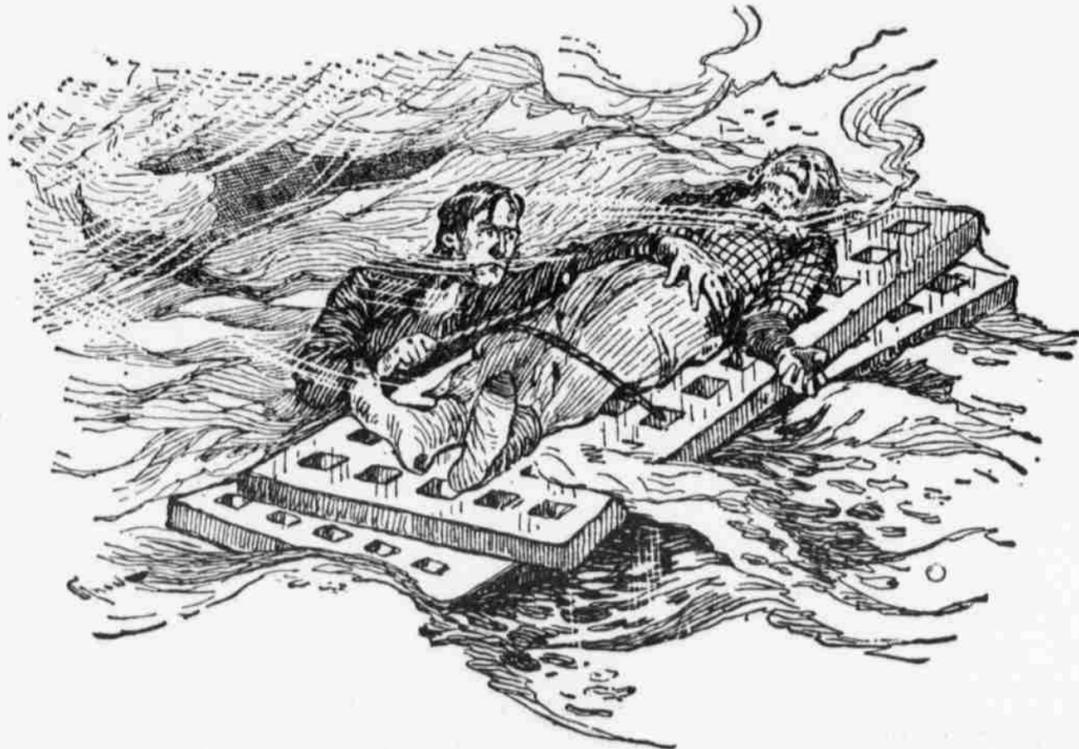
He felt that his strength was giving out and he caught at the oar which was nearest to him. It was his movement in doing this that called the attention of the men in the boat to the fact that he was there. The boat was shooting past him as he caught this oar.

The man whose hands were on it and the mate saw him and recognized him at the same moment. The man stared at him

severe that it struck Parton on the chest as might a fist blow, and left him almost breathless.

A moment later a great swell, much larger than the regular, rhythmic ocean undulation on which he had risen and fallen ever since he had been in the water, overtook him and almost overwhelmed him. As he rose, spluttering, above it, he realized that the lumberer had done its work and that the Lydia Skolfeld had blown up.

It dazed him. A moment later he was recalled to the affairs of the passing moment by the sound of a hoarse, choking sob from the captain's grating. Then there came the words in the strange voice which signalled the old man's marvelous recovery of the power



HE MANAGED TO TIE THE INERT BODY TO THE GRATINGS.

which he had thrown overboard.

The plunge into the sea had cleared his wits somewhat and with infinite difficulty he managed to roll the captain's inert body over until it rested on the gratings. Then he made it fast there, temporarily, by putting about it a half-hitch of the doubled line.

The smoke pall was heavy on him at the surface, and he had much difficulty in sufficiently controlling his nerves and muscles to make it possible for him to get his clasp knife from his pocket with one hand while with the other he held to the grating, which, rising and falling on the long swell of the Atlantic, seemed to endeavor intelligently to elude him.

But at last the line which anchored the gratings to the burning ship was severed, and with slow and painful strokes he swam, trying to force the raft out of that dreadful pall of stifling smoke.

A dozen times he had to duck his head beneath the water to ease his burning eyes. A dozen times he feared that he had lost the sense of direction and was pushing the floating gratings nearer to instead of farther away from the burning vessel.

Bits of sail and tackle flew blazing through the air and fell on him or around him, hissing as they were extinguished by the water of the sea. More than once, with infinite effort, he thrust some flaming bit from off the prostrate and insensate body of the captain.

It seemed to him that it must be that he was swimming in the very course of the smoke, which streamed with the wind from the blazing vessel, but still he feared that if he changed his course he would take himself and his helpless charge back so near to the wreck that they would be struck by falling spars or involved in the general destruction which would come with the explosion.

The tremendous detonation which would tell that the fire had reached the lumberer he expected every moment. If it should occur while they were near to the ship he knew that their escape would be practically out of the question.

in stupid amazement. The mate struck viciously at his head with a long boat hook with which he was fending floating wreckage away from the bows, but did not hit him. Not an articulate sound was uttered on either side. The oar was left floating in Parton's hands; but the boat shot through the smoke and out of sight. After it had passed Parton heard a stream of oaths, which he knew were uttered by the mate and which struggled back to him through the thick air, gradually becoming less and less distinct as the distance between him and the boat became greater.

Perhaps it was anger at the inhuman conduct of the mate, who had thus abandoned them; perhaps it was the aid which he got from the oar which he swung around so that it rested beneath his chin. At any rate, Parton put forth new energy and, a moment later, emerged from the stream of smoke with a suddenness which made him feel as if he had been actually thrown out of it with speed.

The relief to his burning lungs and streaming, smarting eyes was not immediate. The eyes he relieved somewhat by ducking his head beneath the water with them open, but it was several moments before the pure air seemed to replace the acrid, irritating, smoke-laden smother which he had drawn into his chest.

But an instant later the relief which he felt at this was eclipsed by another and instantly overwhelming amazement. From the gratings to which he had lashed the apparently inanimate form of the captain came articulate words, intelligently connected. In a high, weak voice, not exactly like the captain's old, sturdy tones, but still unmistakably his own, he heard:

"Well! By John Quincy Adams! There goes the Lyddy!"

Almost simultaneously with the speaking of the word there rolled across the water a dull, muffled report, as of the firing of a great gun under tons of earth, or the bursting of a blast in a mine, indistinctly heard above ground. And accompanying it there came a blast of hot, smoke-tainted air, so

of intelligent speech.

"Goodbye, Lyddy! Goodbye, old girl!"

CHAPTER XVI.

God's greatest sarcasm was when He put a thirsty man afloat upon salt water.--The Log Book of The Lyddy.

There was something so unexpected, so startling, so uncanny both in the fact that the captain could speak and in the strange, unnatural voice in which the words were uttered, that Parton, dazed as he was by the dreadful happenings of the past few hours and heart sick as he was because of this last trick which Fate had played him, almost cried out in his amazement and surprise; but restrained himself, even in the excitement of the emergency, fearing the effect upon the captain. A ripple from the swell upon which they were being slowly lifted caught him as his lips were parted, and what he had intended to say became a helpless splutter. The captain's eyes were turned in his direction.

"I ain't all right yet, Mr. Parton," he said. "Just you do the thinkin' an' I'll keep quiet for a while. Am I tight lashed on?"

"That's good," said the captain, with the queer voice growing a little faint. "That's good, because--I--am--a--goin' to faint away."

Which, by the expression and color of the face that Parton saw as the swell lifted him, a moment later, he knew that he had done.

Once in a while, as Parton paddled as energetically as he felt was safe, considering the undoubted necessity for husbanding his strength, he felt certain that he could hear half-smothered mutterings from the grating to which the old sailor was lashed; but he was careful not to reply to them for fear that he would thus consume what little strength he had left, and he was becoming unpleasantly conscious how that little was growing alarmingly less with the lapse of time.

It was not very long before he found that he must begin systematically to force his mind away from his present distress if he wished to keep his body afloat. Too