

第三章 博士的朋友/友谊的渊源/肯尼迪在伦敦/一个出乎意料令人不安的计划/没人喝彩的谚语/几个非洲遇难者的名字/气球的优越性/弗格森博士的秘密

Chapter 3 The Doctor's Friend.—The Origin of their Friendship.—Dick Kennedy at London.—An unexpected but not very consoling Proposal.—A Proverb by no means cheering.—A few Names from the African Martyrology.—The Advantages of a Balloon.—Dr. Ferguson's Secret



导

读

弗格森的朋友迪克·肯尼迪和他的性格完全不同，是大家公认的最好的马枪射手。肯尼迪身高超过六英尺，威武勇猛。两人在印度时在同一军团，博士经常出去探险，回来后便到老友家住几个星期。

这两年博士没有提出新的探险计划，肯尼迪想博士的探险天性已恢复平静。而一天早上的《每日电讯》报使他明白：博士是在孕育一个大的探险计划，于是马上坐车第二天就到伦敦弗格森家中，将报上的消息得到了证实。

博士告诉他，自己不会不通知他就走的，并希望他也去。博士让他坐下来，两人边吃午饭边谈了起来。肯尼迪指出博士的计划是空想；又问博士既然想实现这个计划，为什么不走平常的路线。

博士激动地告诉他，到目前为止，还没有人成功；接着又列举了好多为此探险的科学家在路途中被野人及野兽杀害，还有的被疾病夺去了生



迪克·肯尼迪

命。博士表示在到达非洲之前，自己是不会和气球分开的。他将乘着它越过高山、飞过江河，完成这次使命。肯尼迪问他是否找到了控制气球的办法。

他表示利用稳定的信风，先坐英国政府派的船到桑给巴尔，在那里给气球充气，然后出发。博士说自己可以让气球上下自如运动，并保证不会漏掉每一个气体分子。

肯尼迪假装表示同意，但他在暗自观察着。

*D*r. Ferguson had a friend—not another self, indeed, an alter ego, for friendship could not exist between two beings exactly alike.

But, if they possessed different qualities, aptitudes, and temperaments, Dick Kennedy and Samuel Ferguson lived with one and the same heart, and that gave them no great trouble. In fact, quite the reverse.

Dick Kennedy was a Scotchman, in the full acceptance of the word—open, resolute, and headstrong. He lived in the town of Leith, which is near Edinburgh, and, in truth, is a mere suburb of Auld Reekie. Sometimes he was a fisherman, but he was always and everywhere a determined hunter, and that was nothing remarkable for a son of Caledonia, who had known some little climbing among the Highland mountains. He was cited as a wonderful shot with the rifle, since not only could he split a bullet on a knife-blade, but he could divide it into two such equal parts that, upon weighing them, scarcely any difference would be perceptible.

Kennedy's countenance strikingly recalled that of Herbert Glendinning, as Sir Walter Scott has depicted it in "The Monastery"; his stature was above six feet; full of grace and easy movement, he yet seemed gifted with herculean strength; a face embrowned by the sun; eyes keen and black; a natural air of daring courage; in fine, something sound, solid, and reliable in his entire person, spoke, at first glance, in favor of the bonny Scot.

The acquaintanceship of these two friends had been formed in India, when they belonged to the same regiment. While Dick would be out in pursuit of the tiger and the elephant, Samuel would be in search of plants and insects. Each could call himself expert in his own province, and more than one rare botanical

specimen, that to science was as great a victory won as the conquest of a pair of ivory tusks, became the doctor's booty.

These two young men, moreover, never had occasion to save each other's lives, or to render any reciprocal service. Hence, an unalterable friendship. Destiny sometimes bore them apart, but sympathy always united them again.

Since their return to England they had been frequently separated by the doctor's distant expeditions; but, on his return, the latter never failed to go, not to ASK for hospitality, but to bestow some weeks of his presence at the home of his crony Dick.

The Scot talked of the past; the doctor busily prepared for the future. The one looked back, the other forward. Hence, a restless spirit personified in Ferguson; perfect calmness typified in Kennedy—such was the contrast.

After his journey to the Thibet, the doctor had remained nearly two years without hinting at new explorations; and Dick, supposing that his friend's instinct for travel and thirst for adventure had at length died out, was perfectly enchanted. They would have ended badly, some day or other, he thought to himself; no matter what experience one has with men, one does not travel always with impunity among cannibals and wild beasts. So, Kennedy besought the doctor to tie up his bark for life, having done enough for science, and too much for the gratitude of men.

The doctor contented himself with making no reply to this. He remained absorbed in his own reflections, giving himself up to secret calculations, passing his nights among heaps of figures, and making experiments with the strangest-looking machinery, inexplicable to everybody but himself. It could readily be guessed, though, that some great thought was fermenting in his brain.

"What can he have been planning?" wondered Kennedy, when, in the month of January, his friend quitted him to return to London.

He found out one morning when he looked into the Daily Telegraph.

"Merciful Heaven!" he exclaimed, "the lunatic! the madman! Cross Africa in a balloon! Nothing but that was wanted to cap the climax! That's what he's been bothering his wits about these two years past!"

Now, reader, substitute for all these exclamation points, as many ringing

thumps with a brawny fist upon the table, and you have some idea of the manual exercise that Dick went through while he thus spoke.

When his confidential maid-of-all-work, the aged Elspeth, tried to insinuate that the whole thing might be a hoax—

“Not a bit of it!” said he. “Don’t I know my man? Isn’t it just like him? Travel through the air! There, now, he’s jealous of the eagles, next! No! I warrant you, he’ll not do it! I’ll find a way to stop him! He! why if they’d let him alone, he’d start some day for the moon!”

On that very evening Kennedy, half alarmed, and half exasperated, took the train for London, where he arrived next morning.

Three-quarters of an hour later a cab deposited him at the door of the doctor’s modest dwelling, in Soho Square, Greek Street. Forthwith he bounded up the steps and announced his arrival with five good, hearty, sounding raps at the door.

Ferguson opened, in person.

“Dick! you here?” he exclaimed, but with no great expression of surprise, after all.

“Dick himself!” was the response.

“What, my dear boy, you at London, and this the mid-season of the winter shooting?”

“Yes! here I am, at London!”

“And what have you come to town for?”

“To prevent the greatest piece of folly that ever was conceived.”

“Folly!” said the doctor.

“Is what this paper says, the truth?” rejoined Kennedy, holding out the copy of the Daily Telegraph, mentioned above.

“Ah! that’s what you mean, is it? These newspapers are great tattlers! But, sit down, my dear Dick.”

“No, I won’t sit down!—Then, you really intend to attempt this journey?”

“Most certainly! all my preparations are getting along finely, and I—”

“Where are your traps? Let me have a chance at them! I’ll make them fly! I’ll put your preparations in fine order.” And so saying, the gallant Scot gave way to a genuine explosion of wrath.

“Come, be calm, my dear Dick!” resumed the doctor. “You’re angry at me because I did not acquaint you with my new project.”

“He calls this his new project!”

“I have been very busy,” the doctor went on, without heeding the interruption; “I have had so much to look after! But rest assured that I should not have started without writing to you.”

“Oh, indeed! I’m highly honored.”

“Because it is my intention to take you with me.”

Upon this, the Scotchman gave a leap that a wild goat would not have been ashamed of among his native crags.

“Ah! really, then, you want them to send us both to Bedlam!”

“I have counted positively upon you, my dear Dick, and I have picked you out from all the rest.”

Kennedy stood speechless with amazement.

“After listening to me for ten minutes,” said the doctor, “you will thank me!”

“Are you speaking seriously?”

“Very seriously.”

“And suppose that I refuse to go with you?”

“But you won’t refuse.”

“But, suppose that I were to refuse?”

“Well, I’d go alone.”

“Let us sit down,” said Kennedy, “and talk without excitement. The moment you give up jesting about it, we can discuss the thing.”

“Let us discuss it, then, at breakfast, if you have no objections, my dear Dick.”

The two friends took their seats opposite to each other, at a little table with a plate of toast and a huge tea-urn before them.

“My dear Samuel,” said the sportsman, “your project is insane! it is impossible! it has no resemblance to anything reasonable or practicable!”

“That’s for us to find out when we shall have tried it!”

“But trying it is exactly what you ought not to attempt.”

“Why so, if you please?”

“Well, the risks, the difficulty of the thing.”

“As for difficulties,” replied Ferguson, in a serious tone, “they were made to be overcome; as for risks and dangers, who can flatter himself that he is to escape them? Every thing in life involves danger; it may even be dangerous to sit down at one’s own table, or to put one’s hat on one’s own head. Moreover, we must look upon what is to occur as having already occurred, and see nothing but the present in the future, for the future is but the present a little farther on.”

“There it is!” exclaimed Kennedy, with a shrug. “As great a fatalist as ever!”

“Yes! but in the good sense of the word. Let us not trouble ourselves, then, about what fate has in store for us, and let us not forget our good old English proverb: ‘The man who was born to be hung will never be drowned!’”

There was no reply to make, but that did not prevent Kennedy from resuming a series of arguments which may be readily conjectured, but which were too long for us to repeat.

“Well, then,” he said, after an hour’s discussion, “if you are absolutely determined to make this trip across the African continent—if it is necessary for your happiness, why not pursue the ordinary routes?”

“Why?” ejaculated the doctor, growing animated. “Because, all attempts to do so, up to this time, have utterly failed. Because, from Mungo Park, assassinated on the Niger, to Vogel, who disappeared in the Wadai country; from Oudney, who died at Murmur, and Clapperton, lost at Sackatou, to the Frenchman Maizan, who was cut to pieces; from Major Laing, killed by the Touaregs, to Roscher, from Hamburg, massacred in the beginning of 1860, the names of victim after victim have been inscribed on the lists of African martyrdom! Because, to contend successfully against the elements; against hunger, and thirst, and fever; against savage beasts, and still more savage men, is impossible! Because, what cannot be done in one way, should be tried in another. In fine, because what one cannot pass through directly in the middle, must be passed by going to one side or overhead!”

“If passing over it were the only question!” interposed Kennedy; “but passing high up in the air, doctor, there’s the rub!”

“Come, then,” said the doctor, “what have I to fear? You will admit that I have taken my precautions in such manner as to be certain that my balloon will not fall; but, should it disappoint me, I should find myself on the ground in the normal conditions imposed upon other explorers. But, my balloon will not deceive me, and we need make no such calculations.”

“Yes, but you must take them into view.”

“No, Dick. I intend not to be separated from the balloon until I reach the western coast of Africa. With it, every thing is possible; without it, I fall back into the dangers and difficulties as well as the natural obstacles that ordinarily attend such an expedition: with it, neither heat, nor torrents, nor tempests, nor the simoom, nor unhealthy climates, nor wild animals, nor savage men, are to be feared! If I feel too hot, I can ascend; if too cold, I can come down. Should there be a mountain, I can pass over it; a precipice, I can sweep across it; a river, I can sail beyond it; a storm, I can rise away above it; a torrent, I can skim it like a bird! I can advance without fatigue, I can halt without need of repose! I can soar above the nascent cities! I can speed onward with the rapidity of a tornado, sometimes at the loftiest heights, sometimes only a hundred feet above the soil, while the map of Africa unrolls itself beneath my gaze in the great atlas of the world.”

Even the stubborn Kennedy began to feel moved, and yet the spectacle thus conjured up before him gave him the vertigo. He riveted his eyes upon the doctor with wonder and admiration, and yet with fear, for he already felt himself swinging aloft in space.

“Come, come,” said he, at last. “Let us see, Samuel. Then you have discovered the means of guiding a balloon?”

“Not by any means. That is a Utopian idea.”

“Then, you will go—”

“Whithersoever Providence wills; but, at all events, from east to west.”

“Why so?”

“Because I expect to avail myself of the trade-winds, the direction of which is always the same.”

“Ah! yes, indeed!” said Kennedy, reflecting; “the trade-winds—yes—truly—one might—there’s something in that!”

“Something in it—yes, my excellent friend—there’s EVERY THING in it. The English Government has placed a transport at my disposal, and three or four vessels are to cruise off the western coast of Africa, about the presumed period of my arrival. In three months, at most, I shall be at Zanzibar, where I will inflate my balloon, and from that point we shall launch ourselves.”

“We!” said Dick.

“Have you still a shadow of an objection to offer? Speak, friend Kennedy.”

“An objection! I have a thousand; but among other things, tell me, if you expect to see the country. If you expect to mount and descend at pleasure, you cannot do so, without losing your gas. Up to this time no other means have been devised, and it is this that has always prevented long journeys in the air.”

“My dear Dick, I have only one word to answer—I shall not lose one particle of gas.”

“And yet you can descend when you please?”

“I shall descend when I please.”

“And how will you do that?”

“Ah, ha! therein lies my secret, friend Dick. Have faith, and let my device be yours—‘Excelsior!’”

“‘Excelsior’ be it then,” said the sportsman, who did not understand a word of Latin.

But he made up his mind to oppose his friend’s departure by all means in his power, and so pretended to give in, at the same time keeping on the watch. As for the doctor, he went on diligently with his preparations.