



THE CONVALESCENCE OF GERALD

By Georgia Wood Pangborn

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FREDERIC DORR STEELE

THE Doctor began in a tone suavely cynical: "Of course, if you *will* keep him done up in cotton wool—" then he met Gerald's sad eyes, looked again at his patiently folded hands, and burst forth hotly: "Madam, take those collars off that boy, and cut his hair, and take off his shoes! Yes, sir! Let him go barefoot, I tell you!"

It was understood in the village that when the Doctor said "Sir" to a woman the case was a serious one.

"Let him play with French children if he wants to. Never mind their morals. Let 'em teach him how to steal apples and grow fat!"

The pale face in the centre of the broad collar quivered with a smile which was repressed with swift politeness behind his thin hand. Mrs. Bailey quailed.

"Steal apples!"

"Get him a horse and a big dog—a puppy with some ginger in him, that will walk on him and wash his face."

"W-walk on him?"

"When you've done these things you can call me in again. I shan't come before."

The first arrival at the Bailey stables was a nebulous yellow mass, with appendages of head and feet. The ears were

still raw along the outer edges where they had been clipped to points, and this was rather premature, for one could not yet tell whether he would be mastiff or Great Dane when he grew up. The ears were clipped on the Great Dane hypothesis.

Johnny Premo, the coachman, said: "Yas, he one big dog. Gon be bigger. Doctor he come up to see if he's big 'nough. Mis' Bailey say she couldn' get no bigger. Doctor say, has he tried knockin' down Gerald? Mis' Bailey say she so 'fraid an' cry. Gerald, he put his arms 'round puppy's neck an' say his name gon be Joriander, outersome book he been readin'. Puppy put his arms roun' Gerald's neck an' wash 'is face an' roll 'im all roun' an' 'en Mis' Bailey cry some more. Gerald laugh. Doctor say, all right. Gerald he sleep with 'im that night. Me, I got wash 'im, all tam, all tam."

After Joriander was established came one day a slim, graceful thing with sweeping tail, the arch of whose pretty neck did not reach the shoulders of the black carriage horses. Her eyes were of maternal softness. She trod with an airy swing, but chose her steps fastidiously, seeming to make certain that no smaller thing than herself was underfoot.

Johnny Premo said: "She one Arab pony. Mr. Bailey, he say she cos' some-

ting. Doctor come up to see 'ow she do. We put the new saddle on 'em—all silver and yellow leather, an' hist up Gerald an' hol' 'im on, an' 'e tumble off soon's we leggo, an' she stop an' turn roun' an' look sorry, an' we put 'im up again an' 'e fall off again, but 'e laugh all tam, an' don get scared, an' bimeby they go roun' the stable yard without Gerald fallin' off, an' Mis' Bailey cry, and Mr. Bailey say, she worth every penny, an' the Doctor say, Hurrah, we're comin' on! I fin' Gerald out here nex' mornin' six o'clock curryin' her with his own lil brush an' comb. Says 'er name's Dolly."

"That? Oh!—Gerry Bailey. Don't you know the Doctor said they'd lose him if they didn't let him go barefoot and all sorts of things. Still, I don't see why she need make a circus of him."

"Gerry Bailey, *riding!* I thought it was as much as ever he could be taken around in a baby wagon!"

He wore blue denim overalls and a straw hat like a toad-stool. His delicate bare toes squirmed nervously against Dolly's warm ribs, letting the stirrup swing empty. Joriander shambled at one side with a countenance fierce and sullen—unless you were brave enough to draw near and read



"Yas, he one big dog. Gon be bigger."—Page 496.

The town's two important streets cross at its centre, and of these, the greatest is Elm, which extends from the post-office and railroad station in the west to some indefinite eastern point among farms, calm and smooth under its old trees and between its substantial houses.

The people sit about on verandas and lawns and embroider or play croquet, and particularly they watch all that passes in Elm Street.

"What on earth!" said Mrs. Simpson. She was in a red rocking-chair under an arbor vitæ scalloping a bib for her first grandchild. Her daughter, Mrs. Ferry, who was swinging in a hammock and reading a magazine, looked up and said:

the baby innocence of his eyes. Then you understood how his great jaws merely grew that way, and had nothing to do with his soul.

Yet he could be stern on occasion, for when Gerald's hat blew off he flung upon it with such violent punishment that he brought back only a small piece of the brim as proof of justice done, the way executioners used to deposit the heads of a king's enemies at his feet. Then Gerald laughed until he fell into the soft wayside grass, and there Joriander danced upon him with rabid affection until Mrs. Simpson came, saying, "Get down, you nasty dog!" and lifted Gerald to the saddle again.

It is said that on that first journey he

was put back thus six times by troubled neighbors, and his riding has been compared to that of the White Knight in "Alice," but it was no great distance from Dolly's back to the ground, and they always managed to reach grass before the tumble came.

So when Gerald returned to his own gate, where his trembling mother waited, his cheeks were like wild-rose petals, his eyes gleamed, and his closely cropped hair, the hat being gone, was like red gold in the sun.

Each day there were fewer tumbles, and

Dolly's walk was more rapid, until, about the first of July, she broke into a careful gallop. The people left their embroidery and croquet and stood along the sidewalk ready to pick up the White Knight, but it was not necessary. Gerry smiled as he passed them. The smile was not so gentle as it had been. Someone called it a grin. After that it was observed that the pink stayed in his cheeks. Then the neighbors stopped being sympathetic. They even spoke of Joriander resentfully as "that great dog," talked of muzzles and called their own dogs into the house when he



Gerry was standing up on her back.—Page 499.



Sad Dolly kept on, Gerry riding like a little cavalryman.—Page 500.

appeared. He *was* growing, but that was nothing he could help.

"Will you tell me what *that* is?" gasped Mrs. Simpson. She was putting scallops around the edge of her first grandchild's dress.

"Well, she *has* made a circus of him!" said Mrs. Ferry.

The saddle was gone from Dolly's back. Instead there was a blanket with a wide strap. Dolly was treading as if she said, "Now, hold your breath!" Gerry was standing up on her back. This was near the end of July. The rose color of his cheeks had vanished under tan, and the tan was usually obscured by dirt. His feet were more like bronze than wax. His red-gold hair was bleached to silver and so were his eyebrows and eyelashes. As he passed the people of Elm Street he yelled "Hi!" and did not tumble off.

Mrs. Ferry said she had heard he was playing with French children—had been observed with Dolly and Joriander up at the sand-pit with a large and ragged following, making some kind of fort which the wind of the night always destroyed, so that it was like Penelope's web and had to be built anew each morning, for there is

not enough clay in that region to make such edifices hold together properly.

"You never see them *with* him," explained Mrs. Ferry. "You know how those young ones are, they vanish if you come too near, but I've made them out with my opera-glasses. He's a regular little king of beggars. When I was there to tea, he said to his mother, 'Me, I don' lak health food no more.' And she said, 'Gerry, with *whom* have you been playing?' And he said, 'The Doctor said I might.' And she didn't dare answer a word. I have my opinion of the Doctor."

"What in the world ails that horse!" said Mrs. Simpson. Dolly had grown old and dreary over night. Her head drooped almost to her fetlocks. She stumbled with bent knees awkwardly. Gerald, if anything, was gayer than ever, but that is a man's way. How could he know that she was proud after the manner of women, loved pretty things and had great notions about being fashionable, and that he had that morning broken her heart?

By an intricate arrangement of ropes a toy express cart, such as small boys drag about by the handle, was hitched behind Dolly. It contained a half bushel of stones

whereon sat the boldest of Gerald's ragged followers, switching her heels and shouting, "G'lang!" It was all Dolly could do not to hit the contrivance as she walked. A kick would have been the easiest thing in the world.

"What a shame!" said Mrs. Simpson.

Yet perhaps this discipline was good for Dolly. She may have been too proud and gay, have looked scornfully, for instance, upon the poor old plugs in Gran'pa Santwire's sand cart, for these, indeed, were the strangest pair in the country, both being broken-backed, but in different ways, for one sagged until his back was like the letter U, but the other was telescoped so that his legs were too near together, and his spine was humped, poor soul!—till he looked very like a camel.

Even these two now turned to stare at Dolly, while aristocratic beasts drawing correct carriages pretended to shy, and the people all laughed. But sad Dolly kept on, Gerry riding like a little cavalryman, tremendously pleased with himself, the ragged imp behind switching Dolly's heels—that could have kicked so easily—and shouting, "G'lang!"

Thus the Doctor met them, and as usual stopped to take a reassuring pinch of Gerald's biceps, which now had grown from nothing to the size of a cherry, to look at his clean, pink tongue, and tickle him in the ribs to bring out the dimples. The ragged imp slid promptly from the pile of stones and faded into the color of the road, which was the same as his rags, in swift retreat.

"Are you sure Dolly likes that?" then asked the Doctor, who kept a professional eye on that little person also, having perceived at the first glance that she was a gentlewoman in thin disguise and as human as anybody.

"Why, she understands we're just playing." But Gerry's tone was troubled. "I thought she was just sleepy——" He clambered down, lifted the mare's head, and looked searchingly into her clouded eyes. Then with trembling mouth corners he untied the ropes and left the load standing as it was.

"It was for the fort, but maybe we can manage some other way," he sighed.

Dolly's head came up. She tossed her forelock out of her eyes, and said

"Honyhnhnm!" softly through her silken nose. Joriander thrust a warm congratulatory kiss in her face and described rapid circles of joy about the group. Very far down the yellow road, something that might have been a hummock of sand with a straw hat on it, waited watchfully.

"Who is that little boy you play with so much, Gerry?"

"Why that's Napoleon Shampine. He knows *everything*. I was surprised when you told me I was to play with the French children, but I'm glad, because they're ever so much nicer than *us* children. Why you wouldn't believe the things I've learned from Napoleon!"

"Such as what, Gerry?"

"We-ll, I—I'd rather you wouldn't mention it to Mamma, but it's principally about—well—*devils*, you know."

"Oh!"

"There are so many kinds and they do such strange things. I was really a little—alarmed—until he told me how to 'make the horns.'"

Gerry illustrated with grimy thumb and little finger.

"If you only remember to do that you're perfectly safe."

"I see."

"And he has promised to teach me other things——"

"Well, I don't know," said the Doctor anxiously. "I——"

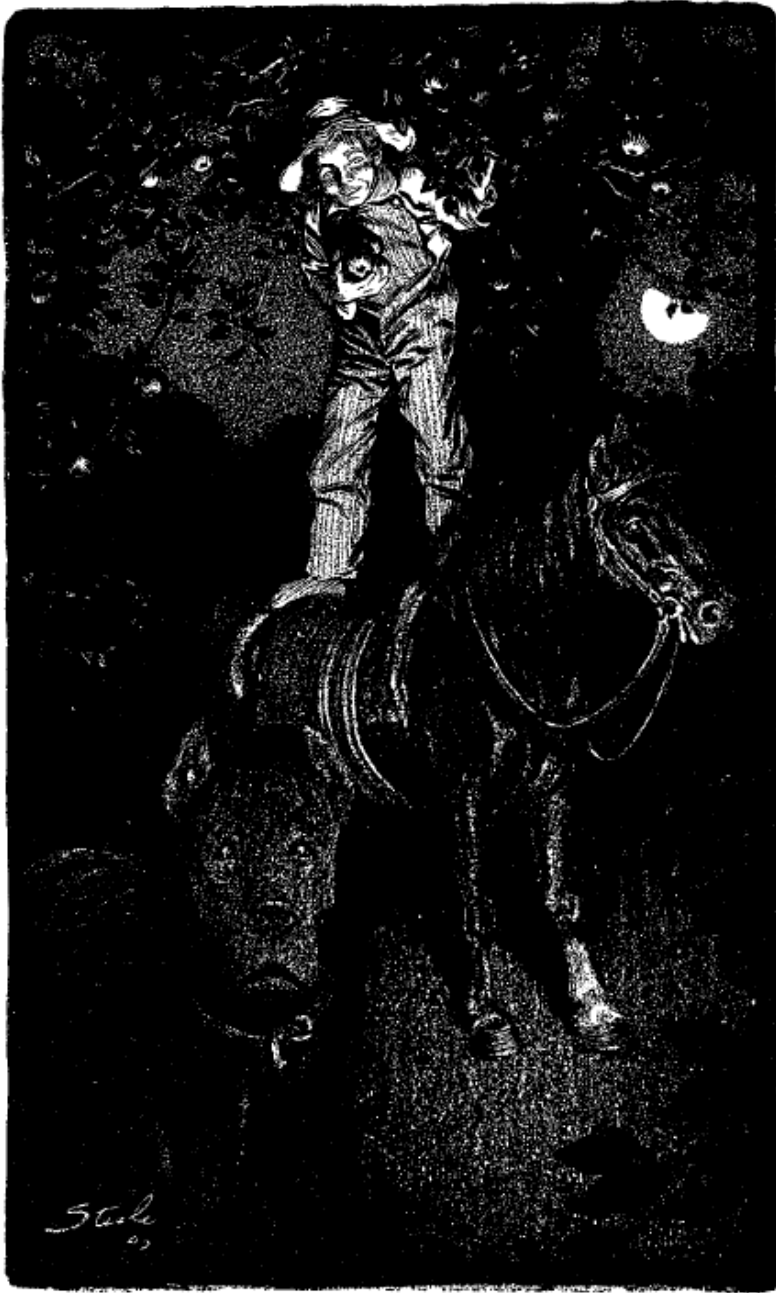
"I'll tell you bimeby," said Gerry. He had mounted and was smiling—perhaps grinning—at the distant speck in the road.

"It's only what you told me to do," he said reassuringly, "and I want you to be s'prized."

Then according to the habits inculcated in his nursery life he leaned forward and put up his dirty little face to be kissed before riding on to join his fidus Achates.

How poor Dolly spurted over that distance! Was it accident or design that made her overturn the wretched express cart in the first leap? The Doctor swore it was design. Elm Street people started up from their embroidery and things and cried out that she was running away, but that was slander. She was only very happy.

The Doctor was a busy man, who slept soundly, but in apple time he kept a shotgun loaded with pepper beside him, left



Shot a red beam into his favorite Fameuse tree.—Page 502.

his window open toward the orchard, and turned his Pekin ducks in there, which are as good as geese when it comes to saving Rome.

One night he woke to a shrill peal of elfin laughter, after which the hurried thumping of the ducks' feet and their alarmed "hwank" was plain, and he tumbled into his trousers, but whether or not there was

a disarming quality in that laugh, the shotgun with pepper in it was left behind, and he carried nothing with him but a bull's eye lantern. As he entered with clumsy stealth under the drooping branches of a winter pear, the ducks flashed by, glimmering, ghostly, heavy-footed, and a distinct, sibilant whisper came out of the darkness ahead: "You done it! Wat I tole you!



"It does make you rather hungry to be out at night, doesn't it!"—Page 503.

Run!" Simultaneously the Doctor was thrown to earth and hot jaws were at his throat.

"Joriander!" said a familiar voice, something like the society tones of Mrs. Bailey, "I'm surprised." The cover of the lantern flew back and shot a red beam into his favorite Fameuse tree, where a laughing and astonished face seemed suspended. Lower down were the soft but troubled eyes of Dolly, shining like a deer's while she held her ground with unwilling heroism.

Joriander withdrew, embarrassed, avoiding the path of light from the lantern.

"Gerry Bailey!" said the Doctor, slowly regaining his feet, "I'm surprised!"

"Yes, sir. I didn't intend you should know just yet."

"Where's that—that——"

"You mean Napoleon? He went away.

"Er—is it—that is—is it exactly safe for you to stand on Dolly's back that way to get the apples?"

"It's very convenient, but she *did* jump a little just now when you came."

"Shall I never," mused the Doctor inwardly, "be cured of hyperbole! But who would have supposed the little imp would have taken it literally! I only mentioned the extremest thing I could think of—oh, well——"

"I don't know," he said, "that the night air is just the thing for you, Gerry. We—that is—suppose we go into the dining-room? There's some floating island left from tea which is very digestible, and some

oatmeal cookies. By the way," he said, casting a lantern ray at a small tree near the orchard entrance: "Did you get any of the Anson's Water-core?"

"No, sir; just the Fameuse. I didn't know any of the rest were ripe, except the Duchess and Astrakhan, and we have those at home."

"The Anson's Water-core is new," said the Doctor. "Where's your bag?"

"Oh—why, Napoleon has it."

"The dev—I mean, you don't say! Well, we'll get some of these and go along to the house. They're as good as the Fameuse, I fancy—but different. You hold one up to the sun and you can see the light through it. I'd been intending to send some over to your mother. I guess we can find a bag or something at the house."

The Anson's Water-core were green and difficult to find. Dolly smelt out one first and crunched it while the other two were hunting. When they had a dozen or so they started again for the house, Joriander following apologetically. Once he thrust a wet nose against the Doctor's hand.

"Don't," said that gentleman, "you make me nervous. Just think what might have happened if Gerry hadn't been there!" And Joriander dropped to the rear. Nevertheless, he was allowed to follow the two into the dining-room. At their entry an astonished cat, who was watching a mouse-hole, vanished, with a distinct suggestion of brimstone, into outer darkness.

Dolly stood outside and sampled a lilac

bush, peering in through the screen, bright-eyed and wistful.

The Doctor looked at Gerry attentively by the light of the bull's-eye, made him put out his tongue, and roll up his sleeves to show how fat he was getting, probably for the pleasure of the thing, as it was not twelve hours since he had reassured himself as to those matters.

"You *are* coming on," he said, dished out a liberal bowl of floating island and found a plate of graham cookies, watching their disappearance with professional enthusiasm.

"It *does* make you rather hungry to be out at night, doesn't it?" observed the marauder, politely.

"You haven't tried it before, then?" said the Doctor with relief.

"No, sir. You said, you know——"

"Y-yes, I know." Was there a grin on the small bronzed face, and a leer in the light blue eyes behind the bleached lashes? The Doctor rubbed his gray hair the wrong way. The pale Gerry for whom he had prescribed horse, dog, and playing with French children, would have been incapable of understanding, much less carrying through, so stupendous a joke as this. He

had thought the mysterious French boy was the prime mover in the affair. Now he doubted.

"I say, Gerry—it's all right when it's *my* orchard, you know, but I wouldn't do it to anybody else's if I were you."

The blue eyes opened wide. "Oh, dear, no!"

The tanned cheeks reddened. "You told me to——"

"Yes—it was rather figurative—but that's all right. Only I don't like your being out in the night air."

When the last yellow drop of floating island was gone the Doctor dressed somewhat more formally, and with his lantern in one hand and a bag of Anson's Water-core in the other saw Gerry home, watching with professional pride his ascent to his room by way of a porch pillar and a grapevine, Dolly having first been put to bed and tucked up, with an Anson's Water-core to go to sleep on.

Joriander stretched his great bulk on the veranda under his master's window. The Doctor patted his head and scratched his pointed ears with great friendliness before he stole away.

"And *that's* all right," said he.