

# THE CAPTAIN

A MAGAZINE  
FOR BOYS & "OLD BOYS."



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[Illustration: cover of "The Captain" volume XXV]

# THE SEA MONARCH

By

**Percy F. Westerman**

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[There was the sound of a hasty scuffling; then appeared the head and shoulders of the owner of the \*Playmate\*](#)

[The mast snapped off close to the deck, and a block, hurtling through the air, struck Gerald a terrific blow over the head.](#)

[Staggering to the door he threw it open. To his great surprise he saw a burly sentry standing without.](#)

[In spite of his strenuous resistance they hauled the deserter out of the empty tank, and then unceremoniously bundled him into the gig.](#)

["Look here, Mr. Schneider, you've come to the wrong box with your sneaking complaints. So clear out!"](#)

[Bending over the instrument was a young officer, his head practically covered with a metal cap fitted with receivers.](#)

The man staggered, clapped his hand to his shoulder, and fell to the deck, the weapon slipping from his grasp.

Schneider cleared the rail, and leapt into the sea.

The doomed vessel was instantly swept out of existence. The massive outlines of the cruiser seemed to melt into a hundred thousand fragments.

As night fell the searchlights played with unceasing vigilance upon the harbour. Suddenly Captain Brookes turned to Gerald. "Does my compact forbid me using the Z-rays?" he asked.

A party of natives appeared on the beach regarding the cruiser with obvious amazement. In their hands they carried long slender spears, which they brandished menacingly.

Like a terrier let loose amidst a swarm of rats the submarine dashed towards the canoes.

A terrific detonation shook the ground, and a thick cloud of smoke obscured the view of the pinnacle. In an agony of fear the natives threw themselves face downwards in the dust.

Seated up to his waist in water was the aviator, clad in an inflated rubber suit. The engine was lost to view, the tips of the twin propellers just projected above the surface.

"Good shot!" yelled several of the officers on the *Olive Branch*. For a full ten seconds the monoplane held on its course, then, lurching like a wounded bird, it swooped swiftly downwards.

The searchlight revealed a huge circular turret with a pair of monster guns. Slowly the submarine swung round, the light travelling the length of the huge mass of weed-encrusted iron and steel.

The four men threw themselves on the astonished foreigners, and a desperate conflict ensued.

"In view of possible events I must ask you to take up your quarters beneath the armoured deck," said Captain Brookes.

An admiral's pinnace was approaching the shattered *Olive Branch*. Gerald hastened on deck to receive the distinguished officer.

image: 06\_admidships.jpg

[Illustration: Crash! The huge vessel, looming out of the fog, struck the little yacht amidships. The stout planks were shorn through as if made of match-board, and the water poured in a cataract over the lee side. (See page [52](#))]

# THE SEA MONARCH

BY PERCY F. WESTERMAN

Author of: "A Lad of Grit," "The Quest of the Golden Hope," etc., etc.

*ILLUSTRATED BY E. S. HODGSON*

image: chapter\_01.jpg

## THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE "ZIETAN"

IT was a scorching afternoon in the month of August. The slanting rays of the sun beat powerfully upon the tranquil waters of Portsmouth Harbour, while the white ensigns of the numerous warships fluttered idly in the almost motionless air.

Swinging easily at her moorings to the first of the young flood lay the torpedo-boat destroyer *Calder*, presenting a very different appearance from its trim state of a few days before. Engine-room defects had occasioned her return to harbour, and as these were of a somewhat serious nature, the opportunity was taken to place the destroyer into dockyard hands for at least two months. The commissioned officers had obtained permission to go on leave, while the *Calder*, in the charge of a gunner, was to be put into dock the following day.

*Ting-ting! Ting-ting! Ting-ting! Ting-ting!* Eight bells had hardly sounded ere two men appeared on deck, scrambling agilely through the small hatchway that did duty for the ward-room companion. The first was the tall, lean-featured lieutenant-commander. The other, Sub-Lieutenant Gerald Tregarthen, needs a slightly longer introduction.

He was almost the same height as the commander, or a fraction under 5ft. 11



ins. in his socks, and was broad in proportion. His features, tanned by constant exposure to sun, wind, and spray, were clear-cut, almost boyish in expression, while at times there was a roguish light in his deep blue eyes.

Yet beneath the apparently boyish exterior lurked the spirit of a man. When occasion arose those merry lips would compress themselves into a thin, straight line, the powerful chin would be thrust aggressively forward, and a dangerous glint in his eyes would betoken that resolution, coolness, and daring which are the indispensable characteristics of a successful naval officer.

His service career, in spite of its comparative shortness, had been one continued success, yet success had not been gained without sheer hard work. With a "first" in gunnery, torpedo, and navigation, he found himself at an early age well up on the list for promotion.

Gerald Tregarthen was in mufti; but his well-cut civilian clothes could not conceal the erect bearing and breezy alertness that characterised the British naval officer. Taking advantage of the *Calder's* temporary idleness, he had applied and obtained permission for six weeks' leave, and, strange as it may appear, his intention was to spend the best part of that time afloat.

There is a story told of a London 'bus-driver who devoted a rare holiday to playing the role of passenger on his own vehicle. Similar motives doubtless prompt hundreds of bluejackets and marines to hire private skiffs during their leave. One has but to go to Southsea beach, the shores of the Hamoaze, or the mouth of the Medway to see jolly tars and jovial "joeys" rowing in shore-boats as if that form of recreation was the greatest treat imaginable. It is, then, not so much to be wondered at that Gerald Tregarthen elected to spend most of his leave on board the 4-ton cutter *Playmate*, at that moment lying in Poole Harbour, the yacht being owned by his old school-chum, Jack Stockton.

The appearance of the two officers on deck was immediately followed by the hoarse orders of the quarter-master. The boat's crew manned the falls, and the little craft was brought alongside the destroyer's starboard quarter. Tregarthen's luggage, consisting only of a well-filled portmanteau, was handed over the side, and, having bade his senior officer goodbye, the sub-lieutenant took his place in the stern-sheets. A quarter of an hour later Gerald Tregarthen landed at the King's Stairs, and, followed by a seaman bearing his portmanteau, walked rapidly through the dockyard to the main gate. Here a lynx-eyed driver; spotting

a likely fare, ran his taxi close up to the spot where the young sub. was standing.

"Town station for all you're worth," exclaimed Tregarthen, but ere he could enter the taxi a boy rushed up to him.

"Evening paper, sir? All the latest naval appointments."

This is a bait that rarely fails to draw the naval man. Taking the paper Tregarthen boarded the vehicle, and was soon bowling along towards the railway station.

Two unavoidable delays were sufficient to alter Tregarthen's arrangements, for on arriving at the town station he found that he had missed the 4.45 Bournemouth train by a bare two minutes. Little did he imagine that the loss of those two minutes was fated to effect a tremendous change in his career at no distant date.

"Next train 6.2, sir," replied a porter in answer to the sub.'s anxious inquiry.

"Just my luck. Over an hour to wait," soliloquised the disappointed sub., and sitting down and placing his portmanteau by his side, he unfolded the sheets of the newspaper.

The "Naval Appointments" he read with more than ordinary interest, inwardly commenting on the good luck or otherwise of those of the numerous officers he knew personally. Then the "Movements of H.M. Ships" attracted his attention. Lower down in the columns was a paragraph that, though he paid scant heed to it at the time, was to vitally affect him within the next few days:—

The new ironclad *Almirante Constant* left the Tyne yesterday. A persistent rumour is being circulated in certain quarters that the vessel, which has been built with the utmost secrecy, is not, after all, to become a unit of the Brazilian navy. Our correspondent has made careful and exhaustive inquiries on this point, but the officials concerned maintain a strict reticence. One thing is certain, however—she is not at present armed, the contract for her ordnance being placed, we understand; with an American firm.

"Blest if I can understand why these South American republics want such up-to-date ships," mused the sub. as he turned over the refractory pages. "It's like giving a child a razor to play with. Well, I suppose it means work for the North Country shipyards; but should any European power lay its hands on half a dozen of them I'm afraid our naval supremacy will have but a very small margin. Hallo! What's this?"

A telegram from Wilhelmshaven, dated the 11th inst., states that the Imperial third class cruiser *Zietan* has arrived here apparently in difficulties, in charge of two tugs. Captain Schloss immediately landed and despatched a lengthy report to the German Admiralty, but, as shore leave is refused, our correspondent is unable to obtain details of the accident from any of the officers or crew. We have reason to believe that a serious disaster has taken place on board.

Later.—From the master of the tug *Vulkan* we learn that the cruiser *Zietan*, while two hundred miles west of Heligoland, suddenly encountered a violent and unprecedented magnetic storm. Practically every electric wire on board was fused, the wireless gear was hopelessly broken down, and the compasses rendered absolutely useless. The *Zietan* was, in fact, instantaneously reduced in fighting value to below that of a cruiser of thirty years ago. It is stated that the ship is still highly charged with electromagnetism, and will have to go into dock for a lengthy period. Captain Schloss was heard to express his doubts that the cruiser would ever be fit for sea-service again.

Gerald Tregarthen read this report with more than ordinary interest. At first he was inclined to scoff at the intelligence. It savoured too much of a fairy story, while it was more than possible that the master of the German tug had been, to use a nautical term, "pumped." Even in his somewhat brief career the sub-lieutenant had experienced several severe electrical storms in the tropics, but the ship's compasses and delicate electrical gear had never been seriously affected. This new danger, should it be repeated, threatened to increase the trials and troubles of the navigator a thousandfold.

"By George!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I must wire to Jack Stockton, or he'll wonder what's happened. But where shall I wire to? It's no use addressing it to the yacht—the post office people will keep the telegram till called for. I have it. I'll wire to Stockton, care of station-master, Poole."

Accordingly Tregarthen strolled over to the post office, discharged his mission, and returned to the dreary platform. At length the long-drawn hour passed, and, taking his seat in a first-class carriage, the sub-lieutenant steeled himself to endure the discomforts of a tedious journey.

At Southampton West his supply of literature was exhausted, so a sixpenny novel and a copy of a London evening paper were purchased. Occupying a prominent position in the newspaper was a further report from Reuter's agent in Wilhelmshaven:—

The mysterious disaster to the cruiser *Zietan* appears to be far more serious than was at first supposed. The ship is evidently heavily charged with an unknown form of electricity. Her standard compass has been sent to the Imperial Laboratory at Berlin. Meanwhile the huge cruiser *Von der Tann*, that was lying in the next dock to that occupied by the *Zietan*, has been affected by the inexplicable current. To avoid further ill-effects, orders have been given to undock the *Zietan* and move her out in the stream.

The next paragraph was to the effect that all telegraphic reports relating to the *Zietan* incident had been received via Middlekerke and Dumpton Gap, the submarine cable between Borkum and Lowestoft being interrupted. A telegraph cable ship had left the Thames in order to locate and remedy the fault.

"Seems something in this business after all," remarked Tregarthen; then, as his eye caught the blurred type of the "Stop Press News," he read:—

*Zietan* incident cable via Lowestoft reports that all traces of phenomenon have vanished. Compasses and electrical gear in normal working order.

The young officer folded up the paper and thrust it under the straps of his portmanteau. The cheap novel remained unread. For the rest of the journey Tregarthen was in a brown study, cudgelling his brains as to what he would do should he ever find himself in command of a vessel under similar circumstances. It was growing dark as the train drew up at Poole. Alighting, Gerald, rapidly passing along the crowded platform, sought his old school-fellow. But no Jack Stockton was to be seen.

image: chapter\_02.jpg

#### INTRODUCES THE "PLAYMATE" AND HER SKIPPER

I SUPPOSE I must try and find the *Playmate*," thought Tregarthen. "Perhaps Jack has not received my wire. I hope he hasn't cleared out without waiting for me, though I shouldn't be surprised. It used to be a favourite trick of his not to wait a minute for anyone."

When Tregarthen had reached the quayside he found that the whole length of the spacious wharf was lined with a double row of coasting brigs, schooners, lighters, and the ubiquitous Rochester barges. On the Hamworthy side the feeble glimmer of the quay lights faintly illuminated the white hulls of a few yachts, but the sub-lieutenant knew that they were of too great a tonnage to correspond with his ideas of the *Playmate*.

Where, then, in all that jumble of floating craft, was Stockton's yacht to be found?

Gerald Tregarthen was at a loss. Beyond a few half intoxicated seamen lurching back to their vessels the quay was deserted. He was on the point of making for the nearest hotel when a voice came apparently from beneath his feet.

"Ferry, sir?"

The young officer looked down. Close to where he stood a flight of stone steps led to the water's edge. It was nearly low tide, and the steps looked particularly uninviting in the dim reflection from the oily water. At the foot of the landing, with barely a couple of inches to spare betwixt the cutwater of a brig and the ponderous rudder of a Thames barge, was a boat, its occupant holding on to a ringbolt in the stonework by means of a short boat-hook.

"Ferry, sir?"

"Do you know of a yacht—a cutter called the *Playmate*?" asked Tregarthen.

"Can't say as 'ow I does, sir," replied the ferry-man. "But I'll call my mate; maybe he'll know." And placing his hands trumpet-wise to his mouth he shouted: "Buck-up! Buck-up Cartridge, where be ye?"

The echo of the man's powerful voice had barely died away when a hail came from the opposite shore. "Hulloa, there?" immediately followed by the faint splash of oars.

"Old Buck-up'll know if there be any craft o' that name," remarked the ferry-man, and as the new comer's boat rubbed its nose against the quarter of the ferry-boat the query was anxiously repeated.

"Wot, *Playmate*, owned by a gent o' the name o' Stockton? Why, sure I do. She's lying off the Stakes."

"Can you put me aboard?" asked Tregarthen, a load removed from his mind at the assurance that his chum had not set sail.

"Certainly, sir," replied Cartridge; and, handing his portmanteau to the ferry-

man, who in turn passed it on to the second water-man, Tregarthen stepped across the first craft into the second.

With long, easy strokes the boat glided with the still strong ebb past the line of shipping and into the staked channel. Here, being comparatively open, the N.W. wind blew fresh, and the young officer shivered in spite of his experience on the bridge of a destroyer. He missed the thick pilot-coat, and the comforting shelter of the storm-dodgers.

Between long, low banks of reeking mud the boat passed, till at length, a good quarter of a mile from the quay, appeared the dim outlines of half a dozen yachts of all sizes, their anchor-lights gleaming fitfully upon the dew-sodden decks and mainsail covers, and casting broken shafts of light upon the ruffled water.

"There be the *Playmate*, sir," exclaimed the waterman, resting on his oars and looking over his shoulder. Tregarthen followed the direction of his gaze.

Twenty yards away lay a smart little white cutter. Even in the gloom the sub-lieutenant could distinguish her graceful spoon bow, her short yet becoming quarter, and the businesslike sheer of her sides. Across her boom a canvas awning was lashed over the diminutive cockpit. From the cabin a light flickered upon the awning, and gleamed cheerfully through the fluted glass skylight. To Tregarthen the vision of that light seemed an indescribable comfort. The tedious journey, the disappointment of Stockton's non-appearance, the cheerless welcome of the bleak and desolate harbour—all were forgotten. He had found a haven of rest.

"*Playmate*, ahoy!"

The waterman jerked one oar into his boat and with the other skilfully checked her way till she gently rubbed sides with the yacht.

"Hallo, there! Is that you, Cartridge?"

"Yes, sir; I've brought a gent off to see you."

There was the sound of a hasty scuffling, the awning was partially unlaced, and a hand holding a lantern appeared, followed by the head and shoulders of the owner of the cutter *Playmate*.

The rays of the lamp fell upon the features of the owner. He had a somewhat long, thin face, with a characteristically square jaw, and light eyebrows that formed an almost continuous line across his brows.

"Hallo, you!" he exclaimed, as the identity of his visitor was revealed. "I'd given you up."

"So it appears," replied Tregarthen. "Didn't you get my wire?"

"Wire—what wire? But don't stay there; come aboard. You'd better use the fore-hatch, unlacing this awning is a blessed nuisance."

Stockton's head vanished as its owner retreated into the cabin. Tregarthen, having paid the boatman, seized the main shrouds and swung himself lightly on deck. Then making his way for'ard he removed the partially open hatchway leading to the fo'c'sle.

"Hold on! Hold on a minute!" shouted Jack. "You're putting your foot into the soup!"

Checking his downward progress just in time, Gerald waited till the skipper, and cook combined, removed a saucepan from the top of a roaring Primus stove, pushed the stove out of the way, and gave the word that all was clear.

The next instant Tregarthen found himself in the fo'c'sle.

It was a small, wedge-shaped apartment, barely 4ft. in height and 7ft. wide at its broadest part, tapering away to less than 6ins. for'ard. This limited space was still further curtailed by a number of lockers and cupboards, the stove, a bundle of sails and warps, and the still weed-covered chain cable. Jack Stockton, pipe in mouth, and huddled up on an upturned bucket, was busily engaged in preparing some flat-fish, that he had just caught, for supper.

Gerald began to cough. What with the heat of the stove, the tobacco smoke, the combined odours of the fish, the soup, and the seaweed, to say nothing of the smoky paraffin lamp, made the confined quarters well-nigh unbearable. It was infinitely worse than the fo'c'sle of a destroyer in a heavy seaway, yet Stockton endured it with equanimity—even with pleasure. It was one of the joys of yachting in the rough.

"Excuse the mess!" he exclaimed. "You see, I didn't expect you after the arrival of the train you agreed upon. But I'll have everything shipshape in a jiffy. Where's your gear?"

"On deck."

"Then bring it below. You may as well get into the cabin, and I'll be with you soon. Mind your head!"

The warning came too late. Tregarthen forgot that the cabin of a 4-ton yacht is a mere dog-kennel compared with the diminutive wardroom of *H.M.S. Calder*, but luckily his thick cap saved his skull from a nasty blow from a deck beam.

Then with a thud his portmanteau was deposited on the floor of the fo'c'sle, and Stockton's voice was heard: "Here, bear a hand, and get this thing into the cabin."

Gerald hastened to give the requested assistance. This time the small of his arched back came into violent contact with the top of the doorway communicating with the fo'c'sle. Thereupon, acting with more discretion, he slowly dragged his belongings into the cabin, and sat down upon one of the sofa-bunks.

By degrees he recovered his ruffled composure, and took a careful survey of his limited surroundings. A glance in a bevelled mirror revealed the fact that his encounter with the deck-beam had had the effect of crumpling his collar into a series of longitudinal creases.

"It's time I put a sweater on," he thought, and opening his portmanteau he produced one of those thick, serviceable articles, and measuring the distance between his head and the deck-beams—a margin of barely 6ins.—Tregarthen removed his collar and plunged into his sweater. This done his sense of comfort was materially increased.

image: 07\_scuffling.jpg

[Illustration: There was the sound of a hasty scuffling; then appeared the head and shoulders of the owner of the *Playmate*]

"Now what do you propose doing?" he asked, as the crew of the *Playmate* tackled a hearty supper. "Going west?"



"I thought of making a dash across the Channel. Any objection?"

Tregarthen whistled.

"Bit risky, isn't it?"

"I don't think so. This packet is as stiff as a house; the gear's sound, and all the stores are aboard."

"You've a compass, of course?"

"A little beauty."

"Then I'm game. By the bye, have you seen to-day's paper?"

"No; I went ashore, but quite forgot to get one. Why—anything startling?"

"Only this," replied Gerald, producing the newspapers he had purchased on the journey, and pointing to the *Zietan* paragraph. "What do you think of it?"

"Not much," replied Jack, in a matter-of-fact tone. "At any rate, I don't suppose it will affect us."

"When do you propose to make a start?" Stockton did not immediately reply, but, gaining the cockpit, he unlaced a portion of the awning.

"Now if you like," he replied. "The young flood has set in, though, but with the wind in this quarter we can stem it and pick up the east-going tide outside. Just hand me down that bundle of charts."

Gerald did so, and his chum picked out one of the English Channel.

"We ought to make St. Catherine's before daybreak," continued Jack "And then with a decent slice of luck we can make a slant across and pick up Cape Barfleur before sunset. It's barely fifty miles as the crow flies. So we'll get under way now, and when we are outside the harbour you can turn in. I had a good spell below during the day, so a night's watch won't trouble me."

"All right; I'm game," repeated Tregarthen. Twenty minutes later the *Playmate* was heeling over to the steady breeze. Her voyage, that was fated to be the

forerunner of a wealth of peculiar adventures, had begun.

image: chapter\_03.jpg

### RUN DOWN

A FEW years ago a commander-in-chief is reported to have declared that our seamen are the worst boat-sailors in the world, while another naval officer of high rank has written: "I don't think there is any foreign navy that is not better than us in the handling of their boats—ours is a disgrace." Thanks, however, to the forethought of the Admiralty in providing fore and aft rigged cutters for the use of the cadets at Dartmouth this stigma is gradually being removed.

Owing to the opportunities thus provided Gerald Tregarthen was no novice on board a yacht. He had steered the college cutters to victory on several occasions, and, now once having acquired the knack of dealing with the *Playmate's* peculiarities, he was quite capable of taking charge of the tiller while Jack Stockton attended to the numerous duties so necessary when about to make a long passage.

Gallantly breasting the young flood the *Playmate* thrashed her way down the well-lighted channel, passed between the sandy dunes that mark the entrance to Poole Harbour, and negotiated the long, buoyed passage under the lee of Studland Heath. Then, the outer bar-buoy being rounded, the yacht was gybing, and her course shaped for the as yet invisible Needles Light.

This done Jack Stockton put on his oilskins, in anticipation of a "dusting," and Gerald Tregarthen turned in for a few hours' rest.

Left to himself the skipper of the *Playmate* settled down to his night's vigil. Lighting his pipe he took up a position on the lee side of the cockpit, whence, by occasionally raising himself, he could command a view ahead. Then, keeping the lee shrouds in line with a conveniently placed star, he was able to dispense with the inconvenience of having his eyes glued to the compass-card. Jack was an old

hand at the pastime of yachting. Scorning the use of a motor as being detrimental to the joys of sailing, he relied upon his weather lore, the judicious use of the barometer, and a thorough knowledge of the tides to make his voyages, and rarely did he fail to make his desired port. He was an ideal yachtsman—calm and resolute in difficulties, patient in adverse circumstances, loth to run unnecessary risks, yet full of courage and reliance.

With the pale grey dawn the *Playmate* was within the influence of the mighty St. Catherine's Race, where, fair weather or foul, the tide surges over the uneven bed of the sea at a good five knots.

"Pity to wake him," exclaimed Stockton, as he put the helm hard up, jibbed, and headed for the distant French coast. "Still it can't be helped."

With the gybe Gerald Tregarthen's berth on the leeward side was transformed into the windward one, and the heel and pitching of the little craft deposited him bodily on the floor of the cabin.

"Hallo! Where are we?" he asked, sleepily.

"You, my dear fellow, are wedged in between the swing-table and the floor; I am still at the helm, waiting to be relieved; and the *Playmate* is approximately two miles southwest of St. Catherine's. Have I made clear our relative positions?"

"Quite, old fellow," replied Tregarthen, scrambling out of the partially closed sliding hatchway. "I'll give you a spell."

"Here you are, sou' by west quarter west," said Stockton, indicating the course; and crawling into the fo'c'sle, he was soon hard at work preparing breakfast.

Having satisfied himself as to the course Tregarthen looked astern. It was a magnificent picture. Away on the port hand a huge man-of-war was heading towards Spithead. By her tripod masts and the peculiar arrangement of her funnels and upper works the sub-lieutenant recognised her as the *Foudroyant*, the latest phase in British naval construction. A mile ahead was a topsail schooner, close-hauled on the starboard tack, her brown and patched canvas gilded by the slanting rays of sunshine, while still further away a few tramps were steaming steadily up Channel, their outlines barely discernible against the morning mist. "How's the glass?" asked Gerald, as his chum regained the cockpit

with a deep tray covered with eatables.

"Steady as a rock. Here, wedge this tray in somewhere, and I'll bring out the coffee. We must rough it a bit when we are having meals under way."

In spite of the pitching of the yacht both members of the crew did full justice to the meal. This over, Jack resumed his place at the helm, and Gerald proceeded to his task of "washing up."

The young sub-lieutenant could not help laughing at the ludicrousness of his position. Here was he—an officer of H.M. Navy—cooped up in a most uncomfortable posture in a cramped fo'c'sle, and undertaking a task that he had never before performed. How his brother-officers would roar with amusement could they but see him. Yet he had to confess that the novelty of the whole thing was delightful.

"What about a wash?" he asked, some time later.

"You'll have to whistle for one," replied Jack. "At least, till we reach port. Fresh water's precious at the present time. I'll tell you what—we'll have a bathe over the side."

Gerald looked at the wake of the little craft. The *Playmate* was bowling along at a bare three knots, and having passed the disturbed waters of the race was now sailing more steadily in the gentle, regular heave of the open Channel.

"How will you manage it—heave-to?"

"No; one at a time. Keep her as she is." Jack quickly divested himself of his clothing, and, grasping the bight of the slackened-off main-sheet, he lowered himself into the sea. There he hung, towed through the waves, with a miniature cascade pouring over his head, till, having had enough, he dexterously regained the yacht.

"Capital!" he exclaimed, shaking the dripping water from his face. "But it's much colder than one would expect for the time of year."

"Deep water always is," replied Gerald, as he prepared to follow his companion's example.

"Are you going to get the dinghy aboard?" he asked, after the ablutionary exercises had been completed. "She's a bit of a drag astern, I fancy."

"No; let her stop. I'm going to turn in now. If it comes on to blow—I don't think it will—give me a shout, and we'll soon whip the dinghy aboard and lash her down securely. In any case turn me out at eight bells."

Gerald thereupon took charge of the helm. The *Playmate* had already reeled off more than thirty miles of her cross-Channel passage. But though the atmosphere astern was perfectly clear, ahead the horizon was obscured by a haze that blended sea and sky together in an indistinct blurr. The wind, too, was slowly yet gradually dying away, and the yacht was doing little more than two knots.

With the falling of the wind the haze increased in density, so that, two hours after Gerald had taken the helm, the *Playmate* was fairly in the thick of a dreaded sea-fog.

"Jack, old man, have you a fog-horn aboard?"

Stockton was wide-awake in an instant.

"By George! This is thick," he exclaimed, for already the yacht's bowsprit end was lost to view in the white, curling vapour. "No, I've no fog-horn; I always use a rowlock. Here's one. We'll lash it up to the sliding-hatch."

This done, he struck the suspended rowlock a couple of sharp taps with a mallet.

"There's enough noise to warn any vessel within a cable's length of us," he continued. Gerald grunted. He knew the ways of the sea. A tramp steamer, forging through the fog at a steady eight knots—as they frequently do—would not pay much heed to anything less than a siren.

"All right," he assented; "I'll see to that. You may as well turn in again."

"I've had enough sleep to last me for a time," replied Jack. "I'll keep watch with you. Here, put this on, or you'll get soaked to the skin," he added, producing an oilskin from one of the lockers, and proceeding to don a second one himself.

"What's that?" asked Gerald, after a prolonged interval, as a dull, pulsating

sound, quite unlike the noise of a steamer's engines, was borne faintly to their ears.

"Hanged if I know! Here, old chap, get a sweep out, and keep way on her. I'll sound the fog-bell."

Tregarthen did as he was asked, for the yacht was now practically becalmed, while Stockton made a vigorous onslaught upon the improvised fog-bell with his mallet.

Nearer and nearer came the mysterious vibrating sound; then, with appalling suddenness, a shrill, long-drawn blast from a siren sounded as if from overhead.

"By Jove! We'll be run down!" exclaimed Jack, calmly, though he fully realised the danger.

The next instant a hoarse voice shouted: "Ahoy there! Starboard your helm!"

Instinctively Jack thrust the tiller hard over; the yacht, responding slowly to the helm, commenced to describe a wide curve; but in less than ten seconds from the time of the hail a ponderous monster of grey-coloured steel loomed out of the fog, its upper portion lost to view in the mist.

*Crash!*

Although doing a bare five knots the sharp steel bow of the huge vessel caught the *Playmate* fairly on the port side amidships. The stout planks were shorn through as if made of match-board, the mast snapped off close to the deck, and, as the stick with its spread of canvas fell over the side the water poured in a cataract over the lee-coaming, and through the huge rent in the side of the doomed yacht.

image: chapter\_04.jpg

#### A PRISONER ON THE MYSTERIOUS SHIP

AT the moment of impact Gerald strove to ward off the oncoming vessel with the unwieldy oar, but the blade found no holding-place against the wet, heaving bows of the leviathan of destruction. Then, with the carrying away of the mast, a block hurtling through the air struck him a terrific blow over the head. Thousands of white lights flashed across his vision as he found himself lying in the already flooded cockpit; yet in his state of partial insensibility he was dimly aware that Jack had seized him round the waist.

With a powerful heave Stockton literally threw his friend into the dinghy, which had meanwhile floated alongside the yacht. Then, springing into the little cockleshell, he whipped out his knife, and with a swift sweep severed the painter. Not a moment too soon.

The colliding vessel had already stopped, and was gathering sternway. The withdrawal of the sharp, wedge-shaped bows from the shattered yacht caused the water to pour in with redoubled violence, and in a smother of bubbles and foam the *Playmate* plunged downwards to her last resting-place.

Jack Stockton seized the oars, which fortunately had been left in the dinghy, and rowed desperately towards the craft that had been the cause of the disaster. Already she was a mere blur in the fog; once lost sight of, the position of the two occupants of the dinghy, adrift in mid-Channel without food or water, would be perilous in the extreme.

Beyond the first hail perfect silence had been maintained on board the huge grey vessel. As Jack gradually gained on her—for the engines had apparently been reversed only for a few revolutions—a rope was flung dexterously over his head. This he made fast to the dinghy's bow-ring, and in absolute silence another coil descended from the lofty fo'c'sle.

Deftly Jack passed a bight round his friend's body just below the arms, and like a sack of flour Gerald was hoisted upwards. This much Tregarthen remembered, though but dimly, and on gaining the deck he lost consciousness.

When the young sub-lieutenant opened his eyes he found himself lying in the

uppermost of two bunks in a small yet conveniently arranged cabin.

"Where the dickens am I?" he murmured, drowsily.

He sat up, and at once discovered that the pyjama suit he was wearing was not his own; then he became aware that his head was throbbing painfully, and on raising his hand to the aching place his fingers encountered a strip of plaster.

Then the details of the collision flashed across his mind, and the anxious question rose to his lips: "Where's Jack?"

Steadying himself by grasping the rounded edge of the bunk, Gerald leant sideways. The effort nearly caused him to lose his balance, but the result of his investigations showed that the lower bunk was unoccupied.

For the space of quite five minutes the injured officer lay still, striving to collect his thoughts as to where and when he last saw his late companion.

Above the centre of the top bunk was an open scuttle, through which the salt-laden breeze whistled like a youthful whirlwind. From where he lay Tregarthen could see that the thickness of the vessel's side at this opening was at least 7ins.—a truly enormous size for the plating of any but a powerful war vessel, and even then it was unusual to continue the armoured belt so far above the water-line.

Curiosity prompted the sub-lieutenant to essay another change of position. This time he met with better success, and was able to look through the narrow, circular aperture.

image: 08\_blow.jpg

[Illustration: The mast snapped off close to the deck, and a block, hurtling through the air, struck Gerald a terrific blow over the head.]

His eyes dilated with astonishment. The fog had completely vanished, and the sun shone brilliantly from an unclouded sky upon the deep blue waters. But the change in the atmospheric conditions was not the cause of the young officer's surprise; it was the apparent motion of the water.

Without the faintest suspicion of a bow-wave—at least as far as Tregarthen could judge—the huge vessel was tearing through the sea at a terrific rate.



Taking into consideration the height of the scuttle above the sea-level, Gerald came to the conclusion that the craft was a cruiser of the largest type, yet in spite of her size he estimated her speed at not less than forty-five knots. The *Calder*, lightly built as she was, could not attain that rate, her greatest pace being a good thirty-eight knots. And with this extraordinary speed there was a total absence of vibration or noise, save the howling of the wind caused by the vessel's own motion, while the faint pulsation of the engines, that had first betrayed her presence in the fog, had entirely ceased.

Then Tregarthen made another discovery. The mysterious vessel was, as far as he could judge by the position of the sun, heading nearly south-west. That meant that, willing or unwilling, he was being spirited away from the shores of Old England at a phenomenal speed—but whither?

Gerald next proceeded to make a systematic investigation of the cabin; but there was nothing to indicate the nationality or nature of the vessel that had effected his rescue. He had an idea that she was a British craft, as the only hail was given in his native tongue; but he had heard the officers of German and Dutch vessels give orders in perfectly good English to pilots and boatmen in home waters.

Besides the double bunks there were a portable wash-hand basin, a bath slung from the ceiling, a small chest of drawers, a couple of cane-seated chairs, and a looking-glass. On one of the chairs were his clothes, in a perfectly dry condition.

With considerable effort he managed to dress; then, staggering towards the door, he threw it open.

To his great surprise he saw a sentry standing without. He was a tall, burly-looking sailor, dressed in a uniform somewhat resembling that of a British seaman, although the blue jean collar was of a deeper shade, and black tape replaced the white ornamentation worn in the Royal Navy. The man had no name on his cap-ribbon, but a device representing a leaf upon his right arm. A black leather bandolier encircled his waist, a cutlass taking the place of a bayonet. He carried "at the slope" a rifle of a similar pattern to the latest form of Lee-Enfield, except that the stock was terminated 6ins. from the muzzle, which was enclosed at that end by a metal cylinder of about 3ins. in diameter. A portion of this cylinder was flattened, apparently for the purpose of using the sights.

This much Tregarthen took in at a glance, but with a peremptory gesture the man indicated that all egress was debarred. There was nothing to do but to obey the mute instructions. Gerald retreated to the cabin, and immediately he heard the sound of a key being turned in the lock. He was a prisoner.

Gerald—too much astonished to concentrate his thoughts—sat down in complete bewilderment. The tragic events of the ill-fated cruise, the mysterious nature of the vessel that had rescued him, the unsolved problem of his friend's disappearance, and finally the ignominy of being held in captivity, crowded in upon his already aching brain. Then an irresistible desire to smoke came over him. He felt in his pocket for his pipe, till, remembering that he had left it in the cabin of the *Playmate*, he bethought him of his cigarette-case, fervently hoping that its contents had escaped damage from the sea-water. To his surprise he found the case filled with a different kind to those he was accustomed to. Evidently his captors meant to allow him every comfort.

Without compunction he began to explore the contents of the chest of drawers. With one exception they proved to be empty, and, what was more, evidently new and unused. In the top drawer, however, was a case containing a brush and comb and shaving materials—also in a perfectly new condition.

In the midst of his investigations the door was unlocked, and, with a preliminary knock, a little, alert-looking man attired in a neat and well-fitting uniform entered.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Tregarthen," he exclaimed. "I trust you are feeling better? My name is White, at your service, and I am the senior surgeon on board."

"Thanks, sir, I am feeling nearly fit. But might I ask what ship is this, and why I am kept under lock and key?"

The doctor shook his head deprecatingly.

"I regret I can give you no information on that point. You must, I am afraid, wait till you have seen the captain."

"But my friend—is he safe?"

"He is safe."

"And——"

"No more questions, if you please, Mr. Tregarthen," interrupted the surgeon, firmly, and in a manner that betokened the uselessness of further inquiries. "Meanwhile, before the captain sends for you, some light refreshment will doubtless be beneficial. I am pleased to see that you are little the worse for your misfortunes."

So saying the medico withdrew, and a steward silently entered the cabin, bearing a tray on which an appetising meal was tastefully spread.

This man was even more unsociable than the doctor, and with as few words as possible he left the cabin, the door being again locked.

Left once more to his own reflections Tregarthen acknowledged that the mystery was almost as dark as before. He had made two discoveries. Firstly, Jack Stockton was safe on board, though possibly a prisoner like himself. Secondly, the ship was more than likely manned by a British-speaking crew, but whether British or American Gerald was unable to say.

At length the sun sank beneath the horizon—a red ball of flaming fire in an indigo sky.

Gerald glanced at his watch. It was a half-hunter, and the well-fitting case had not admitted any water during his immersion. The hands pointed to a quarter to seven.

Here was another mystery. He knew full well that at home the sun set at 7.15 p.m. The ship's course was, as far as he could judge, south-west. How, then, could the apparent discrepancy be accounted for? Perhaps his watch was wrong.

Anxiously Tregarthen waited, listening intently for the ship's bell. Punctually at seven—the second hour of the second dogwatch—came the dim sound of the bell—*ting, ting—ting!* Two sharp blows followed at a longer interval by another. His watch was right, then, and since the course was not easterly he could only conclude that by a hitherto unattainable speed the mysterious vessel had already gained a latitude corresponding to that of the Bay Of Biscay.

Ere the short twilight deepened into night the cabin was brightly illuminated by the warm glow of a pair of electric lights, one at the middle of each bulkhead.

"Well, there's nothing to amuse myself with, so I might as well turn in," thought Gerald, for the excitement of the day, coupled with the fact that he had had but a short spell of sleep the previous night, was beginning to tell. He was on the point of divesting himself of his clothing when the door was unlocked, and a young man evidently an officer, entered.

"The captain wishes to see you, sir," he announced, bringing his hand to his forehead with professional smartness.

image: chapter\_05.jpg

#### **CAPTAIN BROOKES**

ON ships of all nationalities the captain's wishes are his commands. Tregarthen fully recognised this; so, returning the young officer's salute, he followed his guide from the cabin that had for so many hours been his prison.

It was but a few steps to the captain's cabin, but during his journey Tregarthen made good use of his eyes.

image: 09\_sentry.jpg

[Illustration: Staggering to the door he threw it open. To his great surprise he saw a burly sentry standing without.]

As he left the cabin he looked forward. Here his range of vision was limited by an armoured bulkhead, against which stood an arms-rack, the weapons being similar to that carried by the sentry, each having the peculiar cylindrical arrangement close to the muzzle. On either side of the passage were a number of cabin doors; some were ajar, but heavy curtains prevented him from seeing into the officers' quarters.

Between the bulkhead and the captain's cabin on the half-deck a sentry was pacing to and fro. Smartly he came to the salute; Gerald's companion returned the compliment, then, knocking at the door of the captain's quarters, he waited till a deep voice bade him enter.

"Mr. Gerald Tregarthen, sir," announced the young officer, and with this introduction he withdrew.

Gerald found himself in a spacious, well-lighted cabin, comfortably furnished, yet without any pretence at luxury. Thick carpet covered the floor, the walls were painted in a "flat" olive green colour, relieved here and there by a small square port-hole. Right aft a doorway in the armoured plating gave access to a little gallery or stern-walk. The furniture consisted solely of a large mahogany table, two sofa chairs, a well-filled bookcase, a sideboard, and a smaller table littered with papers and drawings.

But Tregarthen paid scant heed to the contents, of the cabin. His attention was drawn to its only other occupant. He was a man of short stature, yet of a commanding and pompous presence, that is so often found in persons whose bearing alone can atone for their loss of inches. He was of a dark olive complexion, with deep-set eyes, full features, dark brown closely cut hair, and a neatly trimmed moustache and "torpedo" beard, after the style affected by British naval officers. He was dressed in a dark blue "mess" uniform, black braid taking the place of the usual gold lace. This, then, was Captain Brookes, the officer in command of the mysterious cruiser.

For a space of nearly half a minute the captain remained silent, apparently "sizing up" the young British officer who had fallen into his power.

On his part Gerald Tregarthen drew himself up to his full height, and, standing stiffly at attention, looked his captor—since captor he undoubtedly was—squarely in the face, having first given him a salute which the captain punctiliously returned.

"Take a chair, Mr. Tregarthen," began Captain Brookes, waving his hand in the direction of one of the settees.

Gerald would have infinitely preferred to remain standing, but there was a veiled authority in the words, and without a sign of protest he yielded. Something in the man's personality compelled the sub-lieutenant to obey.

"You are, I believe, a sub-lieutenant in the Royal Navy? Lately of His Majesty's destroyer *Calder*?"

Gerald started. His interrogator seemed to know everything, but, recollecting

that Jack Stockton had in all probability been subjected to a cross-examination, he replied: "Yes, sir."

"And, judging by this"—here he tapped an official Navy List that was lying on the table—"you are what might be well described as a promising young officer?"

"Might I ask, sir, why I am detained on board this vessel, and why I am subjected to this inquisition?" asked Tregarthen, ignoring the obvious flattery, yet truth, of the captain's last question.

"To come to the point, sir," replied Captain Brookes, "you came on board because there was no choice in the matter; then, finding you are a man likely to suit my purpose, I decided to retain you."

"To suit your purpose?"

"Precisely. What my intentions are I will hasten to explain in a few words. You are now on board the cruiser *Olive Branch*, formerly known as the *Almirante Constant*. The circumstances under which the vessel was acquired from the Brazilian Government I will explain later. The *Olive Branch* has no nationality; she claims the protection of no state or country. Hers is a particular mission; I, a nonentity, though owning no earthly master, am the controlling authority of a universal enterprise. No doubt men will call me a crank, a maniac, or worse. Most benefactors of mankind are so regarded—until they are dead and gone—but public opinion does not trouble me one iota. To be brief and to the point, my mission is universal peace, and my title is "The Exterminator of War."

The captain paused to allow his words to carry weight. Tregarthen gave no sign of incredulity or otherwise. He looked steadily at the man who had made this astounding statement, wondering whether some symptom of insanity lurked behind the calm exterior of his captor. Captain Brooke's features were lit by an earnestness that denotes sincerity of purpose.

"To continue: The *Olive Branch* is the last word in naval construction. I do not make this assertion without having carefully weighed the truth of what I say. Warships claiming to be finality in offensive power have been laid down, yet ere they leave the slips plans for still more powerful vessels have already been passed, and so on. Yet even taking the rapid rate of progress into consideration, I can safely say that a hundred years hence—should there be any necessity for them—there will be no vessels equal to the *Olive Branch* for purposes of offence

and defence.

"I am prepared to show that naval warfare, as demonstrated by the *Olive Branch*, will be so terrible that no nation will dare run the risk of undertaking it. I purpose to police the high seas, and ruthlessly exterminate the fleet of any nation that offers to break the world's peace.

"For years past England has held the proud position of Mistress of the Sea, using her power with firmness and wisdom. But these times are rapidly passing away——"

"Sir, I protest," exclaimed Tregarthen, impetuously.

"Protests are of no avail, unfortunately," replied Captain Brookes, with a suspicion of harshness in his voice. "Review the facts carefully and deliberately, and you will have to admit that what I say is true. Why do other nations, possessing little legitimate interests on the ocean, knowing full well that their seaborne commerce has hitherto been conducted without let or hindrance, suddenly decide to build huge and powerful fleets? To what purpose do they express their intention of rivalling the British fleet? Not from necessity, but from sheer wantonness. Is that not so?"

"Then you, yourself, are an Englishman?"

"I am what I am, a cosmopolitan—a pariah, if you choose to term it so. I prefer to let my identity remain a secret. Now, to put the matter bluntly, are you prepared to throw in your lot with mine for the space of not more than two years?"

"I am not. As a British officer my duties——"

"Then I must take steps to compel you."

"Compel me? You cannot."

"Mr. Tregarthen, before we talk of compulsion—though I admit I was the first to suggest such a step—pray consider the main and side issues of the question. You are bound by a solemn oath to obey your lawful sovereign, King George V. Do you think you could serve him in a better manner than by acquiring the knowledge of what this vessel is, and how she is enabled to possess such

irresistible power? The Admiralty would be only too glad of a chance to gain the secret of the *Olive Branch*. You would to all intents and purposes become a naval attaché, with far greater prospects of gaining invaluable knowledge. Now, this is my offer: Your service for the space of not less than two years; your solemn word that you will obey my orders in all matters, provided you are not called upon to commit a hostile act against your own nation. Means will be afforded you to communicate with the authorities at the Admiralty, in which you can explain the facts under which you were compulsorily detained, and so on. Then, at the end of two years, or before, should my mission be accomplished, you will be permitted to return home, armed with the priceless secrets that are to command universal peace. Is that clear?"

"And the alternative?"

"I do not wish to discuss the alternative beyond saying what I have already stated." Then, seeing that Tregarthen was on the point of giving a direct refusal, Captain Brookes interposed:—

"Now, don't do or say anything foolish. Take time to consider the matter. I'll see you at four bells in the forenoon watch, when I shall expect a definite reply."

*(A second instalment of this thrilling serial will appear next month)*

image: 10\_announcement.jpg

image: 11\_resistance.jpg

[Illustration: In spite of his strenuous resistance they hauled the deserter out of the empty tank, and then unceremoniously bundled him into the gig.] [See page [112](#).



image: 12\_instalment\_image.png

## BY PERCY F. WESTERMAN

Author of "A Lad of Grit," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY E. S. HODGSON

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### Characters in the Story

GERALD TREGARTHEN, sub-lieutenant of H.M.S. *Calder*, decides to spend his leave on a small yacht. He accordingly takes train to Poole, where the craft is lying. On the journey he reads in a newspaper a passage relating to the departure from the Tyne of a powerful cruiser, nominally intended for the Brazilian Government, also a series of reports concerning a mysterious accident to the German cruiser *Zietan*. At Poole he joins his friend and former school-chum.

JACK STOCKTON, owner of the yacht *Playmate*. The same night they put to sea, intending to cross the Channel. When about thirty miles off the Isle of Wight they encounter a dense sea-fog, and the *Playmate* is run down by a large vessel. Tregarthen is stunned by some falling gear, but is saved by Stockton, and both are taken on board the ship that has run them down.

When Tregarthen recovers his senses he finds himself alone in a cabin. From observation he comes to the conclusion that the vessel possesses astounding speed and that she is heavily armoured; also that he is a prisoner. At length he is taken into the presence of

CAPTAIN BROOKES, in command of the cruiser *Olive Branch*. This individual claims that his cruiser is the most powerful vessel afloat, and that it is his mission to exterminate war and secure universal peace, using the super-powerful means at his command to achieve that purpose.

He also informs Tregarthen that, as a British naval officer, he will prove useful to the *Olive Branch* in her mission, and suggests that the sub-lieutenant should serve on board the cruiser for a period of not more than two years. At the end of that time he will be able to impart the valuable knowledge thus gained to the British Admiralty.

Tregarthen is about to refuse, but Captain Brookes reminds him that in any

case he is virtually a prisoner, and adds, "Take time to consider the matter. I'll see you at four bells, when I shall expect a positive reply."

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image: chapter\_06.jpg

#### **THE CONNING-TOWER OF THE "OLIVE BRANCH"**

PUNCTUALLY at ten o'clock on the following morning Gerald Tregarthen was ushered into the captain's cabin. "Well, sir, what decision have you arrived at?" demanded Captain Brookes.

"No decision at all, sir," replied Tregarthen, firmly. "I want first of all to know what you propose to do with my companion."

"With Mr. Stockton? I suppose I ought, as the pirate you regard me, to hold him as a hostage for your good behaviour. But rest assured, I'll have him shipped aboard the first homeward-bound vessel we sight."

"Before I give you a reply I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with him," said Gerald.

"Your request seems reasonable. You may have fifteen minutes' interview."

While speaking, Captain Brookes had touched the push of an electric bell, and a seaman, evidently a petty officer, was immediately in attendance.

"Take this gentleman to his quarters and desire Mr. Black to bring Mr. Stockton to him."

"Very good, sir," replied the seaman, and holding back the heavy curtains that hung over the door he allowed Tregarthen to precede him.

In less than five minutes Jack Stockton had joined his chum.

"Hulloa, Jack! How have they treated you?"

"Can't complain," was the laconic reply. "They told me you were all right in spite of a crack on the skull. Beyond that I didn't worry much, though I've been thinking about my poor old yacht."

"Yes, it's rough luck," replied Tregarthen. "But she's insured, isn't she?"

"Yes. But what does that matter? I shall never have the same craft again; and, Gerald, she was part and parcel of my existence."

"You'll have another one soon."

"Will I? How do you know?"

"Because they are going to ship you aboard the first vessel we meet."

"Ship *me*? How about you?"

"Ah! There's the difficulty. You will be sent home, but, worse luck, they are going to keep me here, whether I like it or not."

"Is that a fact? What is this vessel—a pirate?"

"Goodness only knows. But to put the matter in a nutshell, I have to give my decision whether I'll become one of them or not."

"And if you don't?"

"I've been promised something mighty unpleasant."

Thereupon Gerald related the details of the conversation of the previous evening, and the captain's peremptory demand for a definite reply.

"What do you propose to reply?" asked Jack.

"That's what I want to consult you about. You see there's my position to consider. If I do not turn up within thirty-three days from now I shall be branded as a deserter, unless My Lords take gentler measures and mark me down as missing. If I could serve a useful purpose to my country by accepting the man's proposals I'd do it like a shot, subject to certain guarantees."

"Then why not? In any case you are booked. But I say, old fellow, when you are treating for terms, couldn't you stipulate that I am to be retained as well?"

"You?"

"Yes. I admit, Gerald, I don't possess the same qualifications as you do, but at the same time I'm not a duffer afloat. If this vessel is such a wonderful packet, I'd be only too delighted to stay."

"All right," replied Gerald. "My mind's made up. But the quarter of an hour is up, too, so I must be off."

"Well, sir," asked Captain Brookes, "have you come to any conclusion?"

"I am willing, subject to certain conditions, sir," replied Gerald, firmly.

"And those are——"

"That I am to be treated with the respect due to a British naval officer; that I am not called upon to perform any duties prejudicial to my country——"

"That I have already suggested."

"That I may be allowed to dispatch a communication to the Admiralty stating the circumstances under which I am detained here; and, lastly, that my friend Jack Stockton may be allowed to remain here with me, that being his own desire."

"I agree to your requests," replied Captain Brookes, though Tregarthen noted that he used the word "requests" instead of his expression "conditions."

"Very good, sir."

"You quite understand that my orders are to be implicitly obeyed?"

"So long as I am not called upon to commit any act detrimental to my country."

"That has already been decided."

"Too much stress cannot be laid upon that condition, sir."

"Are you prepared to wear the uniform of officers serving on board the *Olive Branch*?"

"No, sir. The only uniform I am entitled to wear is that of the British Navy. As that is, of course, impossible in these circumstances, I must wear mufti."

"Very well, then," replied the captain. "Now we will make a tour of the ship and you will be able to form some opinion of her capabilities."

So saying, Captain Brookes led the way to the half-deck, whence by the after ladder he gained the quarter-deck. Unlike ships of the British Dreadnought type, the quarter-deck was situated in the after end of the ship, but Gerald noticed that the officers who were walking up and down kept religiously to the port side, leaving the starboard side to the use of the captain. This caused him to wonder how the similarity between the customs of the Royal Navy and those of the mysterious ship was to be accounted for.

Touching his cap to the quarter-deck Gerald found himself upon a vessel apparently of not less than 10,000 tons displacement, or a little more than half of a modern Dreadnought. She was, as far as he could judge, about 300ft. in length, and 60ft. in breadth. She was flush decked; a low slender funnel, a motor cutter and launch, a massive conning-tower, a pair of turrets, and the necessary hatchways and companions alone occupying the centre line. Placed *en echelon* were two more turrets, but in none of these were guns mounted, although each turret had two embrasures.

At frequent intervals along the deck were plates of thin steel inclined at an angle of 45deg.

"These are wind screens," observed Captain Brookes. "They are an absolute necessity, I can assure you."

"Don't hesitate to put any questions you may feel inclined to ask," he continued. "It will be to your interests as well as mine for you to do so. I noticed you were looking at the turrets. These are as yet without their armament, although I hope within a day or two to have the guns in position."

"Then at present you are without means of offence?"

"You will hardly care to make that assertion when you have completed your

first inspection of the *Olive Branch*. But what speed do you think we are doing?"

Tregarthen looked over the side. There was a long, gentle swell setting in from the west, but so great was the ship's rate of speed that she appeared to be travelling over a succession of short, steep seas, yet without the faintest suspicion of a roll or a lurch.

"Forty-five," he hazarded.

"Add twenty to it and you will be nearer the mark. Mr. Gimlette," he added, addressing the officer of the watch, "will you please let me have the present reading of the log?"

The officer ran aft to where the patent log indicator on the taffrail was merrily ringing at less than every fifteen seconds.

"Sixty-seven point five knots, sir."

The reply was given smartly, but in a manner that suggested this speed was an ordinary occurrence. Tregarthen could only gasp in astonishment. It meant the *Olive Branch* was doing an equivalent to a fraction under seventy-five land miles an hour. Were it not for the wind screens it would be almost a matter of impossibility to face the hurricane that whistled overhead.

"You may have noticed the almost total absence of a bow wave," continued the captain. "This is owing to the vessel's remarkable flare—for which the designers must take the credit. By means of an ingenious contrivance the displaced water is led close alongside, yet the 'skin friction' of the hull is not increased. The effect of this diversion is to give the propellers a better grip. As a matter of fact, the 'slip' of the propellers amounts to less than 5 per cent. Now we will make our way for'ard to the conning-tower."

"But what is the motive power?" asked Gerald.

"Petrol, paraffin, or, in fact, any inflammable oil capable of passing through the vaporisers. The motors, which can be attended to by a staff of ten engineers only, actuate five propellers. Thus we are not under the obligation of having to carry stokers. As a matter of fact, the *personnel* of the *Olive Branch*, thanks to mechanical appliances of the most modern type, amounts to 105 officers and men."

The conning-tower consisted of a circular armoured structure 25ft. in diameter, and barely 5ft. above the upper deck. Around the walls were electrical indicators and a maze of pipes painted in distinctive colours similar to those on board a British man-of-war. But the apparatus that riveted Gerald's attention was a board composed of copper and zinc squares resembling a draught board, with a pair of pointers at two adjacent corners. This device travelled on steel lines that formed an almost complete circle, a gap being left in the direction of the after end of the ship.

"Now, Mr. Tregarthen, what do you suppose this arrangement is for?"

"It appears to me to be a sort of position-finding instrument."

"It is more than that. But first I must request you to maintain a strict secrecy regarding what you see in the conning-tower, at least until I withdraw this restriction. Beyond that you are at perfect liberty to discuss with your companion any details concerning the ship," replied Captain Brookes. "Before you left Poole Harbour did you see a report in the papers concerning the German cruiser *Zietan*?"

Like a flash the truth swept across Tregarthen's mind. The ex-Brazilian vessel, *Almirante Constant*, the mysterious agency that had temporarily incapacitated the *Zietan*, and the ship on which he stood were one and the same. So astonishing was the revelation that even he—an iron-nerved naval officer—gasped with amazement. The captain, who was watching the effect of his question, kept silent, awaiting Gerald's reply.

"I did," he assented after a prolonged interval. "But how did you do it? And how were you aware?"

"One question at a time, please. I am on the point of showing you a somewhat ingenious device; what it has already done I will inform you of in due course. This chequered board is divided, as you see, into eighty-one squares, each division representing one square mile. Thus a 'field,' meaning nine miles in either direction, is at my command. Now, supposing a hostile ship is sighted. Her position is determined by the ordinary range-finding instruments. By placing these two pointers on the square representing the ship's position—the pointers, as you will observe, being capable of alteration of length—I release a wireless current, which I prefer to term the Z-ray—upon the enemy's ship. Instantly the



whole of her electrical gear is completely disorganised, and, knowing as you do the vital importance of electricity on board a modern man-of-war, you can realise what it means."

"Then you have already committed a hostile action against the ship of a friendly nation?"

"I suppose I have. It is necessary to experiment, and having good cause to try my device upon a German ship, I proceeded to do so. I am fully aware of the results it occasioned while I kept the *Zietan* under the influence of the Z-rays."

"However did you manage to know that?" asked Tregarthen. "Have you put into any port since leaving the Tyne?"

"I have neither put into port nor have I entered into communication with any vessel excepting your yacht, so obtaining information by those means is entirely out of the question. How I did find out the results of my experiment I will inform you shortly. But to return to this device. You will doubtless have observed that there are two pairs of pointers? Those with a black disc are merely deterrents. Any vessel that persists in forcing an action after receiving the stern warning given by these pointers has only herself to blame for the consequences; for the moment the pointers with the red disc are superimposed upon the others the fate of the *Olive Branch's* antagonist is sealed."

"How?" asked Gerald, with ever-growing interest.

"The conjunction of the red-disced pointers release a super charge of electricity—which I term the ZZ-rays—and her magazines are instantly exploded."

"In that case why do you require guns on board? I understood you to say that you expected to have her armament in position in the course of a few days."

"Chiefly as a matter of precaution. The slightest defect in a terminal, switch, or wire might throw the whole of the electrical apparatus out of gear. But there is another danger I have to guard against—the danger of annihilation from the sky. This device you see here has taken me fifteen years of unremitting toil and thought to perfect, and perfected it is as far as my original plans were concerned. But within recent years the advent of the airship and aeroplane has tended to revolutionise warfare. In order to negative the possible ill results of the ZZ-rays to the vessel that releases them the indicator board is arranged so that the

minimum range is nine miles. Thus I can put a vessel out of action at any distance between nine and eighteen miles. The Z-rays, having a comparatively low electro-motive force, can be brought into play at a distance of two miles, without danger to the *Olive Branch's* delicate mechanism. It consequently follows that to use the rays within the distance of 1,000ft.—the effective range of an airship—the consequences would be disastrous to us. I therefore have to rely on other means. Now I think I have explained the contents of the conning-tower pretty fully, so we will resume our tour."

"But what are these for?" asked Tregarthen, pointing to a triple row of metal studs fixed to a mahogany board on the side of the conning-tower.

"To control the gun fire. When the ordnance is installed I'll explain their use. But we will now ascend to the flying bridge."

With the wind howling over this exposed position like a veritable tornado Gerald was glad to gain the shelter of a diminutive chart-house. Here was the electrical steering apparatus, but, to his unbounded astonishment, Tregarthen found that the place was untenanted, the only other occupants of the bridge being a lieutenant and a seaman, both of whom, glass in hand, were scanning the horizon.

"Don't you keep a hand at the helm?" he asked.

Captain Brookes shook his head. "Not on long ocean voyages," he replied. "The ship steers herself. Like plenty of other problems, it's simple when you know how. The *Olive Branch's* steering apparatus is on the same principle as that of a Whitehead torpedo. The course is set by means of a pointer on the compass-card. The slightest deviation causes a small valve to be opened which actuates the rudder. Of course in confined waters or on going into action we use the steering-gear in the conning-tower."

"I can scarcely grasp the meaning of these wonders," remarked Tregarthen.

## RUMOURS OF WAR

"ONE moment, sir," said Gerald as he accompanied the captain across the fo'c'sle, where a party of men were undergoing musketry exercise. "What is the meaning of that cylinder close to the muzzles of the rifles?"

"It's a silencer—the Lucas silencer, to be exact. I took a fancy to the device and acquired the patent. Mr. Ball, bring me one of those rifles, please."

The gunner brought one of the rifles for inspection. As Gerald had already noted it differed little from the Lee-Enfield type.

"The magazine takes a clip of ten rounds of .202 ammunition," announced Captain Brookes, as he pulled out the "cut-off" and thrust a cartridge into the chamber. "Now, listen."

Bringing the rifle to his shoulder the captain pressed the trigger. Beyond the slight recoil and a faint hiss there was nothing to indicate that the weapon had been discharged, until the still-smoking cartridge-case was ejected.

"I am applying this principle to all our ordnance, from the 6in. down to the revolver. It means a great moral advantage to be in a position to launch a hail of charged shells with a complete absence of sound," continued the captain, as he handed back the weapon. "Now we will——"

"Sail-ho!" came a hail from the bridge.

"Where away?" demanded the captain, in stentorian tones.

"Dead ahead, sir."

"That's the *Puma*, I'll be bound. Mr. Tregarthen, we must postpone the remainder of our inspection for awhile. In the meantime you'll find Mr. Stockton in your cabin. You may inform him that he has the run of the ship, with the exception, of course, of the conning-tower."

So saying, Captain Brookes hurried off to the bridge, the speed of the *Olive Branch* was reduced to less than twenty knots, and preparations were begun for opening communications with the *Puma*, which was already within five miles when Tregarthen went below to rejoin his companion.

"It's settled, Jack; you are to stay aboard the *Olive Branch*," he exclaimed.

"Yes, I know, thanks to you. They've told me that I'm to share your cabin."

"How did you know that?" asked Gerald. "Captain Brookes agreed to my proposal, and ever since then he has not been out of my sight."

"I don't know; I'm here, and there's an end of it as far as I am concerned," replied Jack, philosophically.

"Well, let's go on deck. We've sighted some vessel or the other."

"What's the game—piracy?" asked Stockton, suspiciously.

"I don't think so. But we're easing down, so look sharp."

Together the two chums gained the quarterdeck, the sentry on the half deck coming to the salute as Tregarthen passed. Here, again, Gerald was puzzled, for the man evidently was aware that the young lieutenant was no longer under arrest but had nominally become an officer of the ship.

The *Olive Branch* and the *Puma* lay side by side at about a cable's length apart. There was a total absence of wind, and the sea was as smooth as glass, while overhead the sun beat fiercely down upon the mirror-like surface of the ocean.

On the *Olive Branch* the bo'sun's mate had piped "Clear lower deck," and already the somewhat meagre crew had mustered on the upper deck, where warps and hawsers were being laid out with the evident intention of making fast to the other vessel.

The *Puma* was a tramp steamer of about 6,000 tons, with two stumpy masts, a black funnel, and towering wall sides that had been but partially painted, for a considerable portion of her hull still showed the priming coat of red lead. From an ensign staff over her taffrail the stars and stripes hung motionless in the sultry air. The *Olive Branch* flew no colours.

"I don't think it's piracy this time," remarked Jack. "The men are not armed."

"They seem a well set up lot," said Gerald. "I wonder where they were picked up. Short service naval men and Royal Naval Reserve seamen in all probability."

Tregarthen knew a sailor when he saw one, and his observations were correct. The men had for the most part discarded their No. 1 suits of blue serge, and were dressed in serviceable white canvas. With the utmost alertness and intelligence they executed their orders, which were given with a noticeable lack of bawling and shouting.

Smartly the *Olive Branch* was manoeuvred alongside the *Puma*, large fenders protecting the two vessels from the slight rolling as the latter's derricks were set to work.

In less than two hours eight 6in. guns, each weighing nearly seven tons, were transferred from the hold of the tramp to the deck of the cruiser, besides several smaller quick-firers and a quantity of cases and empty shells. Why the projectiles were shipped apart from their cartridges Tregarthen could not understand, though he resolved to make inquiries at the earliest opportunity.

The work of transhipping the ordnance having been completed, the skipper, a typical New Englander, came aboard the *Olive Branch*, armed with a sheaf of documents. For half an hour he remained below in the company of Captain Brookes, and on returning to his own ship the hawsers were cast off.

Meanwhile Tregarthen noticed that the cruiser's ensign had been hoisted—a device similar to that worn on the seamen's sleeves, evidently representing an olive branch in green on a white field.

As the two vessels parted company, the cruiser making off at a decorous seventeen knots, there was a mutual dipping of ensigns, and a quarter of an hour later the *Puma* was hull down to the north-west.

For the rest of that day all hands were kept busy in mounting the principal armament. The work proceeded with marvellous rapidity, testifying to the splendid mechanical appliances at their command.

Hitherto unnoticed by the sub-lieutenant a powerful crane was cunningly concealed in the wake of each turret, so that when not in use one of the faces of the apparatus lay flush with the deck. By actuating a lever an enormous mass of metal rose to a vertical position, the arm commanding a radius of 20ft., while in the place of a hook was a powerful electromagnet. The top of the hood of each turret was composed of plates of 4in. steel, each section being temporarily held by metal bolts. Round swung the crane, the current was switched on, and plate

after plate was whipped off till the turret was ready to receive its pair of guns. These were then easily lowered upon the mountings that were waiting to receive them, and the roof of the turret was next replaced, men setting to work with electric welding machines to permanently seal the armoured slabs.

The work was still in progress when dinner in the ward-room was announced, and before this function Gerald and Jack were introduced to the other officers of the ship by Captain Brookes.

There were fifteen occupants of the wardroom, all told. Some of the officers Gerald had met before, namely, White, the surgeon, and Christopher Weeks, the young lieutenant who had escorted him to the captain's quarters. Taken together the officers of the *Olive Branch* gave Tregarthen the impression that they were a genial, happy-go-lucky class. They spoke freely on general topics, but studiously avoided "shop," nor did they go into details concerning their past careers.

There was one exception, however.

The scientist, Taylor, who had charge of the laboratory and shell-filling room, was ever ready to let his tongue wag unrestrainedly in spite of the invariable snubbing he received from his messmates.

After dinner Gerald and Jack went on deck. Here strong arc lamps enabled the crew to continue their labours, for Captain Brookes was evidently in a hurry to get the work completed; he was here, there, and everywhere, testing circuits, examining the riveted plates, calling attention to this and that defect, and, in fact, an example of unflagging energy.

"What is this extraordinary hurry for, Mr. Sinclair?" asked Tregarthen of the navigating lieutenant, who had just been relieved on the bridge.

"Don't you know? Hasn't the captain told you the news? We've our first real business in hand. A wireless was received this afternoon that war is to be declared between two South American Republics within a few days. This is where we step in."

"How do they manage the wireless business, I should like to know," remarked Stockton, as the two friends gained the seclusion of their cabin.

"Really, I'm not surprised at anything in this ship," replied Gerald. "How is it

going to end? The *Olive Branch* cannot keep the sea indefinitely. She must take in stores, have her hull coated in dry dock, and undergo a periodical refit. It all costs money, and where does the money come from? Who is this Captain Brookes? A millionaire—a fanatic—or what?"

"I suppose—— Hallo, who's there? Come in." A timid knock at the door had interrupted Jack Stockton's sentence.

A fresh-complexioned round-faced little man edged cautiously into the cabin, and carefully closed the door behind him. It was Taylor, the scientist.

"Well, Mr. Taylor, what can we do for you?" demanded Gerald.

"Hush, sir, not so loud, I pray of you," replied the little man, anxiously, his closely cut greyish hair bristling in his excitement. "My name is Schneider, not Taylor.

image: 13\_complaints.jpg

[Illustration: "Look here, Mr. Schneider, you've come to the wrong box with your sneaking complaints. So clear out!"]

"I am a professor of languages and sciences. You came from Poole, is it not? Zen perhaps you are acquainted with Colonel Mortebeque? I was at one time tutor to his son——"

"Look here, Mr. Schneider," broke in Tregarthen, impatiently. "I don't know Colonel What's-his-name, nor do I want to hear your personal history. Come to the point—what do you want with us?"

"Alas!" groaned the professor with a shudder and a curious grimace. "I have been trapped; brought on ze voyage under false representations. It was to be scientist zat I was brought, but ze Captain Brookes he would me make fill ze shells in ze laboratories. I like it not. He is pirate."

"Who says he is a pirate?" asked Gerald sternly.

"Me, I will not say it. But zen, he is a—a what you call it. Ah! I know—a wizard. You two are also in peril. Will you ask ze captain to let you go on land at ze first port we touch, and take me wit you? Zen we run away and be safe."

"Look here, Mr. Schneider, you've come to the wrong box. If you've any complaint, why not lay it before the captain himself? If as you say the captain is a wizard he might be listening now to what you are saying. You understand? Well, then, clear out."

"A bright specimen of a sneaking waster," remarked Jack, as the cabin door closed on the retreating figure of the professor. "I wonder if there's any truth in his tale, eh?"

"I don't think the skipper will go to that extent," replied Gerald; as he prepared to turn in. "Anyway, we're here, so let's make the best of things. By George! old chap, to tell the truth, I'm jolly glad we came."



image: chapter\_08.jpg

### TREACHERY

FOR several days the *Olive Branch* continued her headlong course southwards, bound for the Magellan Straits, the gateway to the Pacific.

During that time Tregarthen had little opportunity of speaking to Captain Brookes. The little man was literally working night and day.

At length the line was crossed, without the observance of the time-honoured custom of receiving Father Neptune and his court. Then, as if the classic Sea God smarted under the slight, the *Olive Branch* encountered a terrific hurricane ere she had run clear of the Doldrums.

It was as if the sea and sky conspired to wreak vengeance upon the cruiser. The waves ran "mountains high," their rugged crest whipped into clouds of spindrift by the tempestuous wind, while torrential rain, accompanied by rapid and brilliant flashes of lightning, blotted out the field of vision to less than a cable's length ahead.

Yet in spite of the elements the *Olive Branch*, her speed reduced to a bare thirty knots, charged through the foaming waters. Everything was battened down, and well it was, for instead of lifting to the waves the cruiser dashed straight through them.

Tons of water swept her decks as far as the aftermost turret, the spray flying in solid sheets high over her charthouse. Yet she maintained a remarkably even keel, so that, had it been necessary, her guns could have been fought with comparative ease.

Gerald, who, like the rest of the crew save those whose presence was necessary in the chart-house, was compelled to remain below, could not help admiring the steadiness with which the vessel behaved.

"Yes, she's a marvel!" assented Alec Sinclair, the first "luff."

"I don't want to alarm you, but this stability is owing to her low metacentric height. It's only her speed that gives her safety, though I would not give much for my life if she were caught broadside on by one of those waves."

Fortunately these storms, though violent, are of comparatively short duration, and, running directly across the path of a hurricane, it was not long before the *Olive Branch* emerged from the zone of the tempest.

The sea still ran high, though the crests rarely broke inboard, but the hatches were able to be unbattened, and the crew to breathe the fresh air.

"Sail on the starboard bow!"

The officer of the watch, on hearing the hail, immediately acquainted Captain Brookes. During the voyage several craft had been sighted, but, with the exception of the *Puma*—which had previously been ordered to rendezvous at a certain latitude and longitude—they had invariably been carefully avoided. It was a matter of surprise, therefore, that the captain ordered the cruiser's head to be turned towards the strange vessel.

It did not take the *Olive Branch* long to overhaul the craft, which proved to be a German tramp steamer of about 4,000 tons. She was rolling helplessly in the trough of the waves, alternately dipping her topstrakes and showing the greater part of her bilge-keels, while from her mainmast fluttered the international signal signifying that her main shafting was broken.

Maintaining a bare steerage way the *Olive Branch* was brought as close to the disabled vessel as was consistent with safety, and by the aid of a megaphone Captain Brookes expressed his intention of giving the tramp a "pluck" into Pernambuco.

"Are you Engliche sheep of war?" asked the gold-laced Teuton in command, knowing full well that in that case he would be freed from the obligation of paying salvage.

"No," replied Captain Brookes, shortly.

"Den how much you want?" continued the German officer, astutely.

"The same as if this ship were a British Government vessel—nothing at all. So stand by to get out a hawser."

The delighted skipper thereupon asked the name of the cruiser, but Captain Brookes preferred to keep a mysterious silence. Possibly he had ulterior motives

in acting the good Samaritan, but Tregarthen was unable to fathom them.

It was a hard task to bring the tramp's hawsers aboard the cruiser. Twice they parted like pack-thread, but at the third attempt a strong cable was secured to a stout "necklace" passing round the base of the after-turret. Then, at a steady twelve knots, the *Olive Branch* headed for Pernambuco, the disabled tramp wallowing astern like a wounded porpoise.

image: 14\_receivers.jpg

[Illustration: Bending over the instrument was a young officer, his head practically covered with a metal cap fitted with receivers.]

"We can now complete our tour of inspection," remarked Captain Brookes, "since the presence of yonder craft interferes somewhat with our preparations. Bring Mr. Stockton with you."

"Very good, sir," replied Gerald, and in a few minutes the captain and his two *protégés* were descending the steep iron ladder that communicated with that part of the ship below the armoured deck.

Being below the water-line the place was lighted by electric lamps, while every bulkhead and partition was traversed by a maze of wires, hidden by metal casings, each painted in distinctive colours.

At length Captain Brookes stopped before a sliding steel door and beckoned Gerald and Jack to enter. The two chums found themselves in a small lobby, their progress barred by a door similar to the one they had just entered. Carefully closing the outermost door their guide proceeded to slide back the other panel, disclosing a small room lighted only by the fitful bluish sparks emanating from an electrical machine. Bending over the instrument was a young officer, his head practically covered by a metal cap fitted with receivers similar to those worn by telephone exchange operatives.

"This is our wireless room," said the captain, raising his voice to make it audible above the succession of sharp reports like the crack of a whip. "No overhead gear to be carried away in action or in a gale; our wireless messages are received by an electrical current passing through water. The apparatus is merely an extension of the submarine signalling system. We are in touch with our agents at Swanage in England, Plougastel in Brittany, Cape Cod in the U.S.A., and ere long with Sydney, N.S.W., and Antofagasta in Chili. Thus we are

well informed of events that are likely to call for our intervention."

"Then that is how you learned the result of your experiments with the *Zietan*, is it not?" asked Tregarthen.

"A shrewd guess, only it happens to be wrong," replied Captain Brookes. "However, I'll enlighten you on this point."

From the wireless room he led the way forward, between walls of steel that doubtless contained more wonders of mechanical triumph. Passing the cable lockers he dived down a narrow hatchway, leading still deeper into the bowels of the ship, till he arrived at the door of a wedge-shaped room corresponding with the bow of the vessel. Here was a table on which were several electrical coils and a pair of dials resembling galvanometers.

"Here you are," continued the captain. "What do you make of this contrivance?"

"I cannot say," replied Gerald, still nettled by the failure of his previous conjecture.

"That apparatus gives us warning when we are passing over a submarine cable. It used to be an accepted fact that the insulation of our deep sea cables is so perfect that the 'leakage' is infinitesimal, but by this instrument we can detect their presence in any depth down to one hundred fathoms. This done, it is a comparatively simple matter to grapple for the cable, hoist it to the surface and tap it. The great disadvantage is that the ship must be brought almost to a standstill to enable the 'detector' to act, and, of course, wholly so while the wire is being brought on board."

"Then you tapped the Borkum and Lowestoft cable—I remember the newspaper report stated that it was interrupted."

"No, I did not. If anything went wrong with that cable it was merely a coincidence. What would be the use of tapping a cable if by so doing it was made useless for transmitting messages? No, it was the Middlekerke and Dumpton Gap lines we took on board, and consequently heard the whole of the business concerning the *Zietan*, and a considerable amount of other intelligence as well. Now I think you have seen all that there is to be seen for the present," continued Captain Brookes, after the engine-room had been inspected. "There is

one more marvel, on which I pride myself not a little, but until the finishing touches are completed it would be better to say nothing about it. Some day, and at no distant date, I hope to enlighten you on that subject."

"One question I should like to ask—I hope you will not think me impertinent or unduly inquisitive—that is, where did you obtain your officers?"

The captain pursed his lips for a few moments before replying. "They are, for the most part, gentlemen," he observed. "But, unfortunately, they have fallen in the social scale, and wish to regard their past as a closed book. I can tell you of a few cases, though, of course, in strict confidence. Mr. Palmer, one of our lieutenants, for example, was but a few years ago a commander in the Royal Navy. Ran his vessel full tilt on the rocks, was court-martialled, and 'smashed.' As far as his friends are concerned, Palmer—though that is not his real name—is supposed to be away for a three-years' tour in the Rockies. Then there's White, the surgeon—also an *alias*, by the bye. He was a well-known country doctor with a good practice till he fell foul of a coroner's court over some trivial detail. It broke him as far as England was concerned."

"And the men?"

"Are mostly the discarded victims of the British Admiralty's short service system, with a sprinkling of merchant seamen who have been ousted by cheap and inferior foreigners."

"Are you not afraid that some of them will desert and reveal the secret of the *Olive Branch*?"

"It matters little so long as they do not desert in a body; but, thanks to the condition under which they are engaged, I do not anticipate any trouble in that direction. No man is acquainted with the whole of this vessel's mechanism. Even the officers' duties are not entirely interchangeable. For instance, Sinclair, the gunnery Jack, would be helpless on the Z-rays; Taylor—oh! I have forgotten something, after all. With the load of responsibility on my shoulders it's a wonder that I am not even more forgetful. There's Taylor, the scientist; he runs the laboratory with Guy Temple as his assistant. I have not yet shown you his sanctum."

The laboratory was a spacious apartment on the starboard side of the base of the fore-turret, with a hatchway communicating with the orlop deck. In one

corner was a wide bench covered with test tubes, retorts, and similar articles used in chemistry, while on the floor were ranged nearly a hundred cylinders.

"Where's Mr. Taylor?" asked Captain Brookes, of an alert young officer who was engaged in some experiment of scientific research.

"I have not seen him during the last two hours, sir."

"H'm!"

"Shall I send for him, sir?"

"No, it does not matter particularly. Now, Mr. Tregarthen. Here are the explosive charges for the 6in. shells. The projectiles are discharged with Whaddite, an improved form of cordite, but what do you think is the composition of the bursting charges? I'll tell you; it's liquid air. With this explosive a 6in. is more deadly than a thirteen point five shell charged with lyddite. No armour plate can withstand it. Directly we have parted company with the tramp we have in tow, I'll give a demonstration of its power."

The captain's words were interrupted by the appearance of a lieutenant, pale-faced in spite of his tanned complexion, and evidently labouring under suppressed excitement.

"Sir," he exclaimed. "Will you come on deck? The officer of the watch has sent me to say that there's treachery aboard the *Olive Branch*."

"Oh, is that so?" asked Captain Brookes, calmly, then turning to Tregarthen he requested him to accompany him to the quarter-deck.

"Well, Mr. Sinclair," exclaimed the captain as the officer of the watch hurried to meet him. "What's amiss?"

"I observed someone in that vessel astern signalling from the shelter of the bridge, sir," he explained. "I couldn't make out the message, and judging by the manner in which they signalled I took it for granted that the sender wished to avoid outside attention. When I strolled aft the flag-wagging ceased, so I sent Mr. Weeks to your cabin to investigate. He informs me that Mr. Taylor is in the stern-walk and is signalling to yonder German."

"How could he gain the stern walk without attracting the attention of the sentry on the half-deck?"

"I believe, sir, that he slipped over the rail when no one was looking, lowered himself to the canopy of the gallery, and thence to the stern-walk; that's a comparatively easy matter."

"Very good, Mr. Sinclair; carry on as if nothing were amiss."

Thereupon Captain Brookes made for the shelter of the after-turret, whence from the sighting-hood he could command an uninterrupted view of the German vessel without being observed.

"Can you understand German?" he asked.

"Fairly well, sir," replied Gerald.

"Then see what you can make of that," pointing to the rapidly waving flag. "I shall require corroboration."

"*Make an attempt to leave the ship tonight; we will be awaiting you,*" read Gerald.

"That's it," assented Captain Brookes. "They've finished for the present; but I've learnt enough."

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#### AN ACT OF PIRACY

DURING dinner there was nothing to indicate that ere morning strange doings were to be enacted on board the *Olive Branch*. Captain Brookes had given strict instructions to those who were in the secret to maintain silence and to abstain from any words that might alarm the traitor.

The meal therefore proceeded as smoothly as usual, though Gerald noticed that Taylor, *alias* Schneider, was ill at ease, refraining from indulging in conversation, and looking across the table in an absent-minded manner.

When permission was given to smoke the captain excused himself and withdrew.

"Well, Mr. Sinclair?" said he to the officer of the watch.

"I've examined the stern-walk, sir; there is a snatch-block and a coil of rope under the seat."

"You did not disturb them, I hope?"

"No, sir."

"Very good; I'll have the lights going in my cabin and the curtains drawn over the scuttles and gallery door. Keep an eye on Taylor without being observed, and when he makes for the stern-walk inform me."

Shortly after midnight word was brought that the scientist had lowered himself on to the stern gallery; and Captain Brookes, Gerald, Stockton, and the officer of the watch crept cautiously aft so that they could hear the traitor's movements.

The night was pitch dark. All the deck lamps were screened, save the navigation lights, which were invisible from the quarter-deck. The *Olive Branch* was still maintaining a steady ten knots, her wake showing a path of faint phosphorescence till it was interrupted by the hull of the German tramp a cable's length astern.

After a quarter of an hour's vigil the watchers were rewarded by the sound of a sullen splash, and a dark object, outlined in a spray of dim light, veered slowly astern.

"Has he jumped overboard?" whispered Jack Stockton.

"Hist! No, he's slung the life-buoy overboard. There's a line bent on to it."

"You're right," remarked Captain Brookes, as he watched the towed craft through a pair of night-glasses. "They've brought the buoy over the side."



Suddenly the canopy over the stern-walk vibrated violently. The watchers instantly drew back and laid themselves flat on the deck. The next instant the dark outline of a man appeared above the metal covering of the stern-walk. It was Schneider.

The man was active in spite of his obvious cowardice, for with the utmost dispatch he passed the heavy snatch-block over the hempen cable that connected the two vessels and closed its hinged side.

From the hook of the block was a bo's'un's chair. On this the rogue adroitly took his seat, and instantly let go. So cunningly had he laid his plans that he had omitted no detail to ensure success, for the sheave made no sound as the block descended the bight of the hawser, showing that he had not forgotten to oil the large *lignum-vitae* roller.

"Wait till he reaches the middle of the slack," ordered the captain. Then, having ascertained by the aid of his glasses that the fugitive was dangling a few feet from the water midway betwixt the *Olive Branch* and the German vessel, he whipped out a knife and proceeded to sever the hawser.

"Good heavens!" muttered Jack Stockton under his breath. "It's murder!"

"No fear; he'll only get a ducking. They'll haul him inboard by means of the whip," replied Gerald. "Stand by and look out for the hawser when she goes."

The warning had hardly been given when the last strands of the stout cable snapped, the inboard portion flying across the deck. Then, like a greyhound released from its leash, the *Olive Branch* darted off into the darkness.

"Pass the word for the searchlight to be run," ordered Captain Brookes. "Hard a-starboard with the helm."

Round spun the cruiser. Her giant beams swept the gently heaving water, and revealed the tramp, like a silver bark, lying well-nigh motionless a couple of miles away on the starboard bow.

"That will do. Keep yonder craft in sight," continued Captain Brookes. "Now gentlemen, we'll retire. To-morrow morning I'll finish up this business."

At daybreak Gerald went on deck, eager to learn the state of affairs, and found

that Captain Brookes had already forestalled him.

Less than a mile away was the German vessel. Her crew had taken the severed cable on board, and had doubtless discovered that the parting of the tow-rope was caused by a deliberate act, for they had hoisted a staysail and trysail, and were heading slowly S.S.W.

In obedience to the captain's order the *Olive Branch* was brought within hailing distance of the vessel she had befriended, and had in return received such despicable treatment.

"Heave-to," thundered Captain Brookes. "I'm going to send a boat."

"Mr. Slade," he added, addressing one of the lieutenants, "you will please board yonder craft and bring back Mr. Taylor at any cost. Mr. Tregarthen, will you also accompany Mr. Slade?"

The gig's crew scrambled into the boat with alacrity. Every man was armed with a cutlass, while from their somewhat exaggerated holsters peeped the butts of revolvers. The lieutenant was also provided with a pistol, but Gerald preferred to go unarmed.

As the boat drew near to the foreigner the bulwarks of the latter were lined with fair-complexioned, stolid-faced Germans, but no attempt was made on their part to encourage the men of the cruiser to board.

"Throw us a line, will you?" shouted Slade.

"What do you want?" demanded the master of the tramp.

"We want the person who deserted from our ship last night. We know that you aided and abetted him," replied the lieutenant.

"You no come aboard my ship," retorted the master, resolutely. "See dis flag; dis ship German territory," and he pointed aft to where the red, white, and black ensign fluttered from the staff.

image: 15\_staggered.jpg

[Illustration: The man staggered, clapped his hand to his shoulder, and fell to the deck, the weapon slipping from his grasp.]

"In bow! Oars!" ordered the lieutenant, and the boat ran alongside the towering wall-sided hull.

Taking advantage of the roll of the ship the bowman managed to obtain a hold with his boathook on the iron bulwarks. The next instant a sweep with a hatchet severed the head of the boathook and a lump of coal was hurled into the boat. Fortunately it struck one of the thwarts, which prevented the little craft from being stove in.

Slade's face darkened with anger.

"Do that again, and I'll fire," he shouted. At this threat the Teutonic skipper leant over the bridge rails and flourished a revolver. "You pirates!" he drawled. "Stand off, or me fire!"

Then, on giving an order to his men, the cruiser's boat was saluted by a volley of coal and scraps of iron, some of the boat's crew receiving nasty injuries.

This was more than the lieutenant could stand. Without another moment's hesitation he drew his revolver, took a rapid aim, and pressed the trigger.

There was no flash, no noise, only a slight twitching of the lieutenant's arm as the powerful weapon kicked; but Tregarthen saw the German stagger, clap his hand to his shoulder, and fall to the deck, his weapon slipping from his nerveless grasp.

"Now, lads, away boarders!"

Aghast at the fall of their skipper, and still more astounded at the silent messenger that had laid him low, the crew of the tramp offered little resistance, and in a few minutes the cruiser's people were in possession of the tramp's deck.

In response to a signal a second boat left the *Olive Branch*, containing the surgeon in addition to an armed party. Examination showed that the German master's wound was not serious, the bullet having passed completely through the fleshy part of his shoulder; and having attended to the wounded man, Dr. White ordered his removal to his cabin.

"Look here, Tregarthen," exclaimed Slade, "you speak their lingo; tell the first mate to muster his men on deck, or there'll be more trouble."

Thoroughly cowed, the German obeyed, and the crew having fallen in on the upper deck, Slade told off a party of his men to search the *Afrika*, for that was the name of the vessel. A prolonged search revealed no trace of the missing scientist. The mate was sullen under examination, and for a time neither requests nor threats were of any use.

At length, unable to curb himself, Slade drew his revolver and pointed it at the man's head, bidding Gerald to inform him that Taylor must be produced, dead or alive, within five minutes.

Whether the lieutenant meant to keep his word or not his grim determined features compelled the mate to give way, and in response to a guttural order two of his crew, accompanied by four of the cruiser's men, descended to the fore-peak.

The deserter was discovered hidden in an empty tank, and in spite of his strenuous resistance he was brought on deck and unceremoniously bundled into the gig. Then, having achieved the object of their mission, the two boats' crews pulled back to the cruiser.

"Take him below and lock him in his cabin," ordered Captain Brookes, sternly. "Let two men remain with him in case he tries to injure himself. Mr. Tregarthen," he added, "I have to thank you for your assistance in the matter. No doubt you are in need of a meal; your breakfast awaits you."

"I wonder why the captain was so keen on seeing that I had my breakfast?" remarked Gerald to his friend Jack as the pair attacked their meal.

"Goodness only knows," replied Stockton, who had already been acquainted with the details of the visit to the *Afrika*. "But, by jove, if that man calls himself the Exterminator of War, all I can say is he's going a funny way to work. It will end with the *Olive Branch* being denounced as an ocean pariah, and we shall all be hanged."

"It's certainly an act of piracy," assented Gerald. "I should not be surprised if within a week an international squadron is sent in pursuit of us. Yes, Jack, it's rank piracy."

And even while Tregarthen was thus expressing himself, Captain Brookes, with the coolest audacity imaginable, had hoisted the white ensign to the gaff as

the *Olive Branch* glided rapidly away from the outraged German ship.

image: to\_be\_continued.jpg

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**BY PERCY F. WESTERMAN**

Author of "A Lad of Grit," etc.

*ILLUSTRATED BY E. S. HODGSON*

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### **Synopsis**

GERALD TREGARTHEN, sub-lieutenant of H.M.S. *Calder*, being on leave, sails from Poole with his old school chum Jack Stockton on board the latter's yacht *Playmate*. In mid-Channel the yacht is run down; the two friends are rescued, and find themselves on board a mysterious cruiser—the *Olive Branch*—commanded by Captain Brookes. Finding that Tregarthen is a British naval officer, Captain Brookes announces his intention of keeping him on board, and, after due deliberation, Gerald decides to fall in with the captain's plans, as far as his sense of loyalty will permit.

Tregarthen is initiated into the secrets of the *Olive Branch*, including that of the deadly ZZ-rays—an irresistible charge of electricity whereby the destruction of a hostile ship can be effected at will. Captain Brookes also explains that by the power at his command he hopes to make war so terrible that no nation will venture to declare war; thus universal peace will be assured.

During the voyage south Schneider, the ship's scientist, deserts, taking with him some important plans. He is found on board a German "tramp," and is brought back to the *Olive Branch*, whereby an act of piracy is committed.

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**CLEARED FOR ACTION**

IT was six bells in the forenoon watch. The *Olive Branch*, her speed reduced to a bare ten knots, slipped noiselessly through the oily waters, the tropical sun beating down fiercely upon the awning that had been spread over the quarter-deck.

Seated upon chairs abaft the after-turret were the ship's officers, while on either hand were mustered as many of the crew as could be spared from their duties. There was an air of sternness about the assembly, for Taylor, the scientist, was about to be tried on a charge of desertion and treachery.

"Bring in the prisoner!" ordered the captain, and escorted by two armed seamen the culprit was marched on deck and directed to take up a position facing his judges.

"Mark Taylor," exclaimed Lieutenant Palmer, who appeared as prosecutor, "you are accused upon direct evidence of having broken out of this vessel and having sought to obtain a refuge on board the German ship *Afrika*. That in itself is a serious charge; but not content with that breach of discipline you wittingly informed the master of the aforesaid *Afrika* of the secrets appertaining to the ordnance of this cruiser, the *Olive Branch*. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," replied the accused man, with a forced tone of defiance. "I——"

"That will be sufficient for the present," said the lieutenant. "Your evidence will be taken in due course."

Five witnesses for the prosecution having been called, the prisoner was allowed to speak on his own behalf.

The accused scientist tacitly admitted that he had broken out of the ship, but strenuously denied having given any information regarding the cruiser to the master or any member of the crew of the *Afrika*. At first his speech was delivered in perfectly pure English, but by degrees he waxed excitable and spoke with a decided foreign accent.

"And I claim," he continued, "ze protection of ze German flag, for I am a German by nationality."

"Is that so?" demanded Captain Brookes. "How is it that this fact was concealed when you joined this vessel? And why has it remained a secret till this moment?"

"I am a German," reiterated the prisoner. "My name is Schneider, not Taylor. I told zese gentlemen it was so," indicating Gerald and Jack with a wave of his hand. "I told zem I was a German subject, and zat I was about to run away from ze ship as soon as I was able, and zey know it."

"Then why did you not report this to me, sir?" asked Captain Brookes, turning to Gerald.

"The man came into my cabin one evening in an excited manner," replied Gerald, calmly. "He certainly said his name was Schneider, and began to tell us a long rigmarole concerning his private affairs. We told him that if he had a grievance, you, sir, were the best person to hear it. With that we kicked him out."

"Thank you," said Captain Brookes, and, addressing the prisoner, continued, "Are you in a position to inform us where are the drawings and specifications relating to the 6in. shells?"

The accused turned a shade paler than before.

"In one of ze lockers in ze laboratory," he replied.

"If I send you to the laboratory under escort, can you produce them?"

"Hein! If zey are not zare zey haf been stolen," exclaimed Schneider. "Perhaps you haf hidden zem."

"They *have* been stolen, sir," rapped out the captain, harshly; "and by you."



They were found in the cabin of the master of the *Afrika* by Lieutenant Slade. What have you to say to this?"

Schneider's limbs were trembling so violently that one of the seamen had to support him, otherwise he would have fallen to the deck.

"Well, gentlemen, your verdict?"

"Guilty on both counts."

"Mark Taylor, otherwise Schneider, you stand convicted on charges of desertion and treachery. With reference to the first crime I now admit that you are a German subject, and that I was in error in removing you from the protection of the German flag. However, the mischief is done, and I must abide the consequences, though I fear not the whole naval force of that Empire. As to your traitorous act, I can only point out that while in my pay and holding a position of trust on board this cruiser you wilfully betrayed your position as a responsible officer of the *Olive Branch*. In every community treachery against the supreme authority is punishable by death, and it is in my power to inflict that penalty upon you. As, however, your wretched crime has failed to achieve its object, and these drawings are again in our possession, I will waive the capital punishment. You are sentenced to solitary confinement, with sufficient exercise for the maintenance of your health, as long as the *Olive Branch* remains in commission. Remove the prisoner."

Escorted by the two armed sailors, Schneider was led from the quarter-deck. Grimly defiant, he marched between his guards, till on arriving at the companion ladder one of the men preceded him, the other stepping one pace in the rear.

The prisoner descended two steps, then, suddenly turning, he butted the seaman at the head of the ladder. The man fell, and Schneider, seizing his advantage, sprang over his prostrate body, cleared the rail with a single bound, and leapt into the sea.

There was a rush to the side to see the termination of the tragedy, but the luckless man was never seen again.

"That has saved us a great deal of trouble," said Captain Brookes; "unless the mischief's already done," he added, under his breath.

On the following day the *Olive Branch* was running off the east coast of Patagonia, the rugged barren heights of that inhospitable country being plainly visible on the starboard hand.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Tregarthen," exclaimed Captain Brookes as Gerald made his appearance on deck. He spoke with an affability that had been missing during the last few days, but on this particular morning his customary geniality seemed to have reasserted itself. "At last I think that this vessel is fit for action; that is, as far as her armament is concerned. Of course, there may be failures, but these can be easily rectified. I mean to make an experiment to demonstrate the power of the *Olive Branch*, beyond that of her electrical means of offence. In another hour we ought to sight Carlos Rock—you've heard of that, perchance?"

"No, sir," replied Gerald.

"Carlos Rock is a small uninhabited island of less than a quarter of a mile in extent, and towering to a height of 600ft. How many rounds from a 13.5in. gun would demolish it, do you think?"

"I cannot say, sir; but one hit would make a great difference in its appearance."

"Then you'll have an opportunity of seeing what our 6in. gun will do. By the bye, why are most of the British Dreadnoughts able to fire two more guns astern than they can ahead."

"Merely the result of circumstances," replied Tregarthen, bridling under the sting of the suggestion. "The position of the after-turrets is to facilitate the broadside fire."

image: 17\_schneider.jpg

[Illustration: Schneider cleared the rail, and leapt into the sea.]

"Other nations may not think so."

"They can think what they like, sir," replied Gerald.

"So they can, so they can," rejoined Captain Brookes, with an air of a man wishing to remove a wrong impression. "Now, if you will accompany me to the conning-tower, we'll see what's to be done."

The order for general quarters was given by means of a bugle-call, and in a few minutes the scanty crew of the *Olive Branch* were busily engaged in unshipping stanchions and rails. Then, in response to another order the decks were deserted.

"Do they call this 'cleared for action,' I wonder?" thought Tregarthen, but barely had his mind expressed the thought ere Captain Brookes thrust home a pair of levers. Silently the massive steel windshields athwartships sank flush with the deck; the funnel dropped out of sight; the steel boats and other deck lumber disappeared into yawning cavities prepared for their reception; while simultaneously every watertight door in the ship was hermetically sealed. From end to end of the upper deck everything was cleared, save for the four turrets, the light quick-firers, and the massive conning-tower.

"How's that?" asked Captain Brookes, enthusiastically. "Here we are cleared to rapid torpedo-boat attack. Now, watch while I move this lever."

This time the light quick-firers disappeared below the armoured deck, leaving only the principal armament, while heavy steel plates slid noiselessly over the pits into which they had vanished.

"This is where we score again. In modern battleships most, if not all, of the light torpedo-repelling armament is badly protected. In a general engagement the lighter guns would be dismounted in five minutes, and the ship would fall an easy prey to a torpedo-boat attack, especially if carried out with a combined dash. Here the guns are ready whenever they are required. Now, here's Carlos Rock."

Gerald glanced ahead and saw a mass of stone rising almost perpendicularly from the sea, its base lashed by the milk-white surf that pounded incessantly upon its iron-bound shores.

Meanwhile Captain Brookes had given directions to the quartermaster to encircle the rock at a distance of two miles so as to make sure that it was inhabited by no human beings. Ten minutes were sufficient for this manoeuvre, during which time the occupants of the conning-tower swept the desolate-looking island with their glasses; but beyond the presence of myriads of sea-birds the rock showed no signs of life.

"Now, stand by!" exclaimed the captain to Gerald. "I cannot go into details, but you will easily follow what I mean. All eight guns are coupled, ready to fire a

broadside. You see those three index-hands? One shows the speed of the ship, the second the range of the object to be fired at, and consequently the required elevation, the third corrects the effect of windage. When set, a resultant pointer fitted with telescopic sights gives us the correct aim. Stand here and look through this aperture."

Tregarthen did so, and at that moment Captain Brookes depressed the firing-key. Instantly there was a slight tremor throughout the ship, an almost imperceptible recoil, and then a thin haze of brownish smoke, but no noise was audible save the shriek of the projectiles as they left the muzzle with a velocity of 2,500ft. per second. Four seconds later the whole face of Carlos Rock was covered by a dense cloud of dust, and with a dull rumble thousands of tons of rock slid into the sea.

"You've altered Carlos's features, sir," exclaimed Gerald, when he had recovered from the effects of watching this wonderful broadside.

"Ay!" assented Captain Brookes. "What ship would stand up to that, d'you think? Now you can go below and watch the loading operations, for we are going to keep up a rapid fire for half a minute."

Descending a spiral steel ladder which led from the conning-tower to below the armoured deck, Tregarthen found nearly the whole of the ship's company, including those men whom he knew to be captains of turrets. Why the latter should be away from the turrets he could not quite understand.

Seamen, stripped to the waist, were running small trucks laden with shells from the after-magazine. These were placed in a metal hopper at a position corresponding with the base of the foremost turret. When twelve rounds had been deposited in this hopper its doors were closed, and a red light instantly appeared in a dial overhead.

Once again a slight jar shook the ship, followed by eleven others in less than twice that number of seconds. The next instant the hopper door fell open and twelve empty and still smoking cylinders fell upon the floor; a seaman dashed a bucket of water into the compartment, and the work of reloading was repeated.

Then a bugle sounded the "Cease fire," and the officers returned on deck to observe the effects of the terrible ordnance of the *Olive Branch*.

"How's that for going into action?" asked Captain Brookes. "With the exception of three men and myself all hands were safe beneath the armoured deck. Automatic loading and firing, unerring aim, and the victory's won, eh?"

"I certainly should not like to be on board a craft that received one round from those guns, sir," replied Gerald. "But suppose, in the heat of an engagement, one pair of guns was trained so that some portion of this ship intercepted the line of fire?"

"That has been arranged for," said the captain. "Directly the arc of fire on one pair of guns is exceeded, that turret remains locked till the other guns are trained backward sufficiently for that pair to be automatically linked up, so that damage to our own ship from that cause is impossible. Of course, if necessary, each turret can be worked independently, and in that case the captains of the guns would have the control of the firing arrangements."

Further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a signalman.

"Wireless message just received, sir," he reported, handing a sealed envelope to the captain with a salute.

Captain Brookes broke open the envelope, and read and reread its contents without moving a muscle; then he beckoned to those of the officers who happened to be on the quarter-deck.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, "a wireless of extreme importance has just been handed to me. The captain of the *Afrika* has reported an outrage by a ship flying the White Ensign, and representations have been made by the German Ambassador in London. The British Government has rightly repudiated the suggestion that the delinquent was a British man-of-war, and has asserted that, from the description given, it can only be the ex-Brazilian cruiser *Almirante Constant*. Consequently the British and German Governments have issued a joint note branding that vessel as a pirate, and have stated their intention of hounding her down at all costs, and invite the navies of all nations to join them in their task. So, gentlemen, the *Olive Branch* is a modern buccaneer. Every port and harbour is closed against her. However, I'll stick to my purpose, but, rest assured, I will never fire a shot against a British ship—I'll trust to the *Olive Branch's* speed to shake off pursuit. But"—here his face clouded ominously—"should a vessel of any other nationality attempt to interfere with us, I'll give

her a fair warning. If she persist, by Jove, I'll blow her sky high!"

image: chapter\_11.jpg

### WIPE OUT

ALMOST without further incident the *Olive Branch* arrived off the coast of Chili. Hostilities had broken out between that State and her old rival, Peru, but beyond a few encounters between outposts on the frontier, no serious fighting had yet taken place. Both republics were unwilling to undertake the risk of sending an army into hostile territory until the safety of their respective seaboards was assured, and every day news of a decisive engagement between the rival fleets was expected.

Directly the *Olive Branch* was in touch with Captain Brookes's agent at Antofagasta a wireless message was despatched in the form of an ultimatum to the Presidents of Chili and Peru, stating that unless the two fleets returned to their respective ports and peace were declared within three days, the *Olive Branch* would be compelled to intervene.

The ultimatum was duly presented, and a copy appeared in the leading newspapers of the two republics. People began to ask, "What is the *Olive Branch*? And what is her nationality?" Then someone suggested that the message was the work of either a practical joker or a lunatic, and the heads of the two republics treated the message with contempt. Not for one moment did anyone connect the *Olive Branch* with the ex-Brazilian cruiser that had committed an outrage upon the German flag off the port of Pernambuco. The very idea of a vessel being able to travel from that port to Valparaiso—a distance of 4,600 miles—in less than four days never entered into anyone's head, and when the journal *El Mundo* broadly hinted that it was a ruse on the part of the Peruvians to frighten the antagonists, the Chilean fleet immediately put to sea.

This news was communicated to the *Olive Branch* from Antofagasta, followed by the information that the Peruvian fleet had steamed out of Callao, bound south.

"Now we'll have them!" exclaimed Captain Brookes. "We'll get in touch with the Chilean vessels first, then pass them hull down so as to get between the two fleets. This done I hold them in the hollow of my hand." Unfortunately for Captain Brookes his plans were doomed to failure. The fleet of the Southern Republic was sighted and passed as arranged, but in the interval the Peruvian

squadron had altered its course and was steaming for Iquique.

"There they are," announced Captain Brookes, late one afternoon, pointing to a dense haze that obscured the otherwise clear horizon.

"Not much mistake about that, sir," assented Tregarthen. "If those vessels are not burning Lota coal, I'm a Dutchman!"

"It's too late to do anything much to-day," added the captain. "I'll give them a dose of Z-rays, and during the night we'll slow down and hang on their flanks. To-morrow we'll press the business."

Throughout the night the Peruvian fleet, unable to use searchlights and night-sights, pounded along, keeping an erratic compassless course towards Iquique. Unable to explain the cause of the sudden failure of their electrical gear, the officers and men were in a state of nervous tension, expecting every moment to find the Chilian fleet at their heels.

Just before daybreak the *Olive Branch*, to avoid being influenced by the Z-rays that permeated the fleet, put her helm hard over in order to allow the fugitives to gain a few miles.

As she did so a violent explosion shook the ship from stem to stern, and a huge column of water sprang up from alongside her starboard quarter.

"A mine, by Jove!" exclaimed Gerald.

He was right. The Peruvians had strewn the sea with mines as they fled for shelter, and, on turning, the *Olive Branch's* starboard propellers had struck the dangerous weapon.

There was no panic. Every man was at his post, cool and alert. The carpenter came on deck with the reassuring statement that the vessel was not making water, but on the other hand the engineer reported that the three starboard propellers were useless, and that the motors actuating them had to be shut off. Thus with only the three port propellers working, the speed of the *Olive Branch* was reduced to a bare fifteen knots.

"I'll make them pay for this!" exclaimed Captain Brookes, coolly. "Keep her as she is, and at daybreak I'll show them what the *Olive Branch* is capable of



doing."

The short twilight changed into day, and the rising sun revealed the presence of the Peruvian fleet barely seven miles to the eastward.

There were four armoured cruisers—the *Santa Rosa*, *Lima*, *Independencia*, and *Restauracion*, the first three built at Elswick, and the last-named having been constructed at Stettin—and three gunboats. The latter were the lame ducks of the fleet, and in order to protect them the speed of the cruisers had to be reduced from twenty-three to fourteen knots.

But to the surprise of everyone on board the *Olive Branch* the *Independencia* turned and steamed straight for the solitary and apparently foolhardy pursuer, the *Restauracion* supporting her at three cables' length on her port quarter. Throughout the night the *Olive Branch* had been cleared for action, and all that was necessary now was for the men to go to their stations.

"She's too near to use the ZZ-rays," observed Captain Brookes to Gerald, who, at the former's request, had accompanied him to the conning-tower. "I've given orders for independent firing the moment she shows her teeth."

On came the *Independencia*, the foam flying from her bows, her funnels emitting dense clouds of smoke, while no less than five red and white national ensigns flew from her mast-heads and signal yard-arms.

Suddenly her forward 4.7in. Canet gun opened fire, and a huge 45-pounder came hurtling through the air. Fascinated, Gerald watched its approach, unable to tear himself away from the slit in the steel walls, though the projectile was apparently making straight for the conning-tower. Often from behind a gun had he watched the flight of a shell, but now the conditions were reversed.

The next thing he was aware of was a tremendous crash overhead, followed by the fall of splintered steel and a dense suffocating smoke.

"That's settled the charthouse and bridge," remarked Captain Brookes as calmly as if discussing some triviality, then, pressing an electric push, he gave orders for the forward turret to open fire.

The two 6in. weapons were discharged simultaneously, their noiselessness contrasting vividly with the rapid detonation of the Peruvian gun.

The doomed vessel was instantly swept out of existence. The massive, yet graceful, outlines of the cruiser seemed to melt into a hundred thousand fragments, then as the smoke slowly drifted, no trace of the *Independencia* was visible, only an ominous swirl in the agitated waters as the disintegrated hull plunged to its ocean grave.

Appalled by the fate of her consort, the *Restauracion* turned tail and fled, being joined in her flight by the remaining cruisers, the gunboats being left to their fate. But, satisfied by the moral effect of his victory, Captain Brookes desisted from the pursuit.

"We're in a pretty pickle," said Gerald as he joined his friend Stockton. "Partially crippled, and every port closed to us."

"Can't they make good the damage afloat?" asked Jack. "Divers could go down, couldn't they?"

"If it were merely a matter of replacing the propellers they might, but it's the damaged shafting that will cause all the trouble."

"Depend upon it, Captain Brookes will find a way out of the mess," replied Stockton, reassuringly. "The only thing that puzzles me is what he will do should we be overhauled by a British cruiser. If he keeps to his word he won't open fire on her, and if he attempts to run away he'll be overhauled. That's a moral certainty."

image: 18\_doomed.jpg

[Illustration: The doomed vessel was instantly swept out of existence. The massive outlines of the cruiser seemed to melt into a hundred thousand fragments.]

"Well, let's hope we shan't be put to the test," said Tregarthen. "But, by George, didn't the shell which hit us knock up a dust? It simply swept the charthouse and bridge away like brown paper. That means that all the steering will have to be done from the conning-tower until we find time to make good the damage. But stand by—here comes the captain."

Captain Brookes, however, passed them without apparently noticing their presence. He seemed intent upon some great problem, and, lost in thought, he descended the companion ladder and entered his cabin.

"What's the course, Mr. Slade?" asked Gerald of the navigating lieutenant.

"We're going to fall in with the Chilian fleet next," was the reply.

"More pulverising?"

"I cannot say; captain's orders," replied Lieutenant Slade, laconically.

At two bells in the first dog-watch the Chilian fleet was sighted, but the victory was an easy, bloodless one. By means of the Z-rays the fleet was demoralised, and thereupon a signal was sent to Admiral Zaetos's flagship, informing him of the fate of the *Independencia*. On learning that the *Olive Branch* was no myth, the Chilian admiral consented to return to Iquique to await further instructions from the President, and an hour later the *Olive Branch* was alone on the vast Pacific.

"Now to get the damage made good," remarked Captain Brookes, cheerfully. "Have you ever put into Talcahuano, Mr. Tregarthen?"

"No, sir."

"Neither have any of my officers; nevertheless I must do so, for there is a government dry dock there, the only one on the west coast of South America capable of taking the *Olive Branch*. Whether they like it or not, I mean to have the ship repaired there."

Early on the following morning the cruiser came in sight of the port of Talcahuano. Captain Brookes did not mince matters when dealing with the Chilian town; he promptly isolated it by interrupting telegraphic communication by means of the Z-rays, then falling in with a small trading brig he expressed his intention of compelling the master to pilot the *Olive Branch* into harbour.

"Mercy on me, señor, I dare not!" expostulated the terrified man. "The channel is mined; that is why my vessel was hove-to."

"Are you certain of this?" demanded the captain, sternly.

"Yes, señor."

"Well, gentlemen, you hear what the man says," continued Captain Brookes,

turning to his officers. "What do you say?"

"We are willing to leave the matter entirely in your hands, sir," replied Lieutenant Sinclair, confidently.

"That's what I expected," continued Captain Brookes. "And now, señor, go forward and take the helm, for be there one or fifty mines, I mean to enter dry dock before sunset. Mr. Palmer, clear away the submarine."

image: chapter\_12.jpg

#### THROUGH THE MINE FIELD

AT the mention of the word "submarine" Gerald felt the blood surge to his temples. It was not the surprise of hearing that the *Olive Branch* possessed one of these master craft that affected him; he was getting used to surprises. It was the glamour of the enterprise that thrilled him.

For months past Gerald's ambition was to serve in the submarine flotilla. His name had been on the "roster" as a volunteer for the hazardous, yet attractive, service, but up to the time of his leaving the *Calder* his hope in that direction had not been gratified.

"May I accompany Mr. Palmer, sir?" he asked, bringing his hand to his forehead with professional smartness.

"I think not," replied Captain Brookes. "This is a matter that requires skilled men."

"Very good, sir."

Gerald felt the disappointment keenly, but like a true Englishman he bore the refusal manfully. Not so with Stockton; his face showed unmistakable signs of relief when his chum had been thwarted in his desires to embark in a hazardous craft destined for a still more hazardous enterprise.

The *Olive Branch* was now within two miles of the entrance to the harbour. On either side of the narrow mouth were stone forts faced with earth, over which floated the Chilian flag—red, white, and blue, with a white star on the upper "canton" nearest the staff. Beyond were the Government works and the low stone houses of the town, while in the distance the snow-capped Andes reared their lofty peaks to a height of 14,000ft.

"Do you think they'll open fire, Mr. Sinclair?" asked Captain Brookes, jerking his thumb in the direction of the forts.

"I don't fancy so, sir," was the reply. "They will trust to their mines. Since the last war these johnnies think twice before tackling an ironclad."

"Very well, then—carry on. Are your men ready, Mr. Palmer?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Then look sharp about it, if we are to warp into the dock before sunset. By the bye, Mr. Tregarthen," he continued, wheeling round and facing Gerald, "have you had any experience of creeping?"

"Plenty of it in the Vernon, sir."

"I've changed my mind; you may go with Mr. Palmer."

Accompanied by Stockton, who, now that his chum was permitted to take part in the expedition, wanted to share in the perils, Gerald followed the lieutenant and a dozen men down to the orlop-deck.

Here, almost amidships, was an oval-shaped steel box, projecting about three feet above the deck. Unfastening a massive securing-bar, one of the men touched a knob, and the huge rubber-lined lid slowly turned on its hinges and disclosed a similar, though slightly smaller, box. It was the conning-tower of the submarine.

To Stockton the next few minutes seemed like a dream. The lid of the conning-tower was raised, and five of the sailors descended into the recesses of the little craft. Palmer then motioned to Gerald to precede him, and with a hasty grasp of the hand Jack bade his friend a silent farewell.

Then Palmer followed, and ere the lid closed with a ponderous clang Stockton

saw the dim glimmer of the electric light shining upon a mass of complicated machinery.

"Stand aside, please, sir!" said one of the men who still remained on the orlop-deck.

The cover of the outer box descended, the securing bar was carefully locked, and the sound of inrushing water was borne faintly to Stockton's anxious ears.

"They're off now, sir," added the seaman. "If you go on deck you'll be able to see something of what they're up to."

From the top of the conning-tower, which in lieu of the demolished bridge and charthouse was now the highest practicable coign of vantage, Stockton and several of the officers watched the tip of the submarine's periscope glide slowly along the surface of the water, while some 30ft. in the rear was the tell-tale swirl of the vessel's propeller and the characteristic wake of the submersed craft.

Every available glass was brought to bear upon the receding pole-like object, as it kept an unswerving course straight for the entrance of the harbour.

Suddenly a column of water was thrown 50ft. in the air. Stockton gave an involuntary gasp of horror—what if the submarine had fouled one of the deadly mines?

A minute passed. Even Captain Brookes began to look anxious, for no trace of the periscope was now discernible.

"There she goes again!" shouted one of the men, as another slender column rose high in the air.

Four times this was repeated, then once more came an ominous and prolonged silence. While the attention of all hands was directed towards the harbour the grey, porpoise-like hull of the submarine floundered to the surface less than a cable's length from the port bow of the *Olive Branch*. Thus, having announced her safe return, the little craft disappeared beneath the waves, and, guided by consummate skill and judgment, she glided underneath the hull of her parent ship.

Half an hour later her crew came on deck of the *Olive Branch*.

"All correct, sir," reported Lieutenant Palmer. "Every mine exploded; six in all."

"Very good," replied Captain Brookes. There were volumes of commendation in those two words, and every man who took part in the dangerous enterprise realised the fact.

"We must wait another hour till there's enough water on the bar, so our pilot informs me," continued Captain Brookes. "Mr. Sinclair, I'm going below; please report if anything unusual occurs."

"Well, old chap," exclaimed Stockton as the two friends gained the seclusion of their cabin "how did you get on?"

"Splendidly," replied Gerald, enthusiastically. "The submarine is a masterpiece. This was the mysterious object at which the captain hinted during our inspection of the wireless room. I think I've grasped the principle of it. The submarine is barely 30ft. in length and 8ft. in beam, and is housed in a cavity underneath the ship corresponding with the upper half of the submersible. Apparently its natural buoyancy keeps it adhered to the hull of the *Olive Branch*, but to prevent undue friction when running at full speed there are several steel doors, which, when closed, complete the normal curvature of the ship's bottom. You saw how we entered the submarine?"

"Yes, by means of a watertight door in the orlop-deck, and a corresponding one in the submarine's conning-tower."

"Well, directly I descended into the little craft I noticed that she was propelled by electric motors, of about 35 horse-power I should imagine. Forward there is a bow tube of less than 4ins. in diameter, consequently she can carry twenty small torpedoes to our submarines' four. I noticed that the vessel was submerged by means of water ballast instead of relying upon horizontal rudders, although the latter are utilised when running beneath the surface.

"Directly all hands were aboard Palmer opened a valve, and I saw the pale green light filter through the glass of the conning-tower; we had sunk clear of the *Olive Branch's* hull. We descended quite 80ft., in fact, almost to the bottom of the sea, for I could see the water discoloured by the muddy sediment caused by the rush of the still ebbing tide. Then the motors were started, and, once well away from the cruiser, Palmer hoisted the periscope, which hitherto had been

housed within the submarine.

"'Now, then,' said he, 'you know a mine when you see one, so will you please stand by the conning-tower look-out; I'll keep the vessel on her course by means of the periscope.'

"So saying he descended a short iron ladder and took his stand before a small table coated with highly polished silver. This mirror reflected an erect, right image, or, in other words, a faithful reproduction of the horizon as seen from the surface.

"We were running at six knots, so that taking into consideration the strength of the ebb, our rate over the ground was a bare three knots, thus allowing an ample margin to bring up should we sight an obstruction."

"How far could you see ahead?"

"About 100ft., for the water was fairly translucent in the bright sunshine. Had it been dark we could have used a powerful searchlight.

"Suddenly I caught sight of a barrel-shaped object straining at its sinker and cable like a gigantic long-stalked mushroom. Palmer was instantly at my side, having ordered the motors to be eased down. The principle on which the torpedoes are fired is similar to that by which the guns are discharged on board this ship. I saw the slender, fish-shaped weapon leave the tube and glide towards the mark, but the target being a small one, and oscillating into the bargain, the torpedo missed it by a foot.

"The second shot was successful, and although I did not hear the detonation, the shock was sufficient to make the submarine lurch violently.

"This operation was repeated till we found ourselves right inside the harbour, the wharves and the shore being crowded with people attracted by the unwonted spectacle of the presence of a mysterious battleship in the offing."

"Then it's certain that all the mines have been destroyed?"

"All in the channel, at all events, for we could see the outlines of the shoal on either hand, and not a trace of a mine remained. But there's the engine-room telegraph; we're getting under way once more, so let's go on deck."



On gaining the fo'c'sle the two chums found the Chilian skipper shaking with apprehension and anxiety. He had been led for'ard and was conning the ship under the charge of Lieutenant Sinclair, who was an expert Spanish linguist. The lieutenant communicated the pilot's directions to the quartermaster in the conning-tower, who in turn held the *Olive Branch* on her course at a steady five knots.

Even then the depth on the bar was so little that for some considerable distance the ship's remaining propellers churned up columns of liquid mud. Cleared for action she slowly approached the harbour, but, as anticipated, there was no sign of resistance from the forts. On the contrary they respectfully dipped their flags, a compliment that the *Olive Branch* returned by lowering her green and white ensign.

"Mr. Sinclair, will you pipe away the cutter's crew. I want you to take this letter ashore, and your knowledge of their lingo will be useful in case they cannot translate it," said Captain Brookes. "I've told them my requirements, and offer to pay all lawful dock charges and dues. Inform them of events between the two republics, and of our part in the matter."

An hour later Lieutenant Sinclair returned with the information that Captain Brookes's requests were favourably received, and that the *Olive Branch* could go into dock at once. He also bore the intelligence that the alcalde and the commandante of Talcahuano were about to pay a complimentary visit to the cruiser that had, while engaged in the work of settling the differences between Chili and Peru, inflicted a severe loss upon the fleet of the latter republic.

"Good," remarked Captain Brookes, gleefully. "Nothing could be better, gentlemen. I mean to make use of both the alcalde and the commandante of the town during our stay here."

Without further delay the *Olive Branch* was warped into dock and shored up. The water was then pumped out, and, as the captain had prophesied, the cruiser was dry-docked before sunset.

image: chapter\_13.jpg

### TRAPPED

DURING the docking of the *Olive Branch* crowds of townsfolks, soldiers, civilians, and peons flocked around the mysterious visitor, expressing astonishment at her appearance, yet without showing any signs of ill-will.

Nevertheless, no precautions were left undone to safeguard the ship. Two of the guns were pointed at the custom-house, the other pairs covered the arsenal, forts, and the principal public buildings, while, being unable to use the Z-rays on account of the possible consequences to the *Olive Branch*, a party of sailors under Lieutenant Sinclair landed and marched up to the telegraph office with instructions to prevent any messages being sent that related to the presence of the proscribed cruiser.

"Commandante coming off, sir," announced the officer of the watch, just as dinner was about to be commenced.

"Very well, then, turn out the guard of honour," replied Captain Brookes. "Gentlemen, we must postpone the function for a few minutes."

So saying he retired to his cabin to don his full-dress uniform, an example that was followed by the rest of the officers.

On gaining the quarter-deck Gerald found that the guard of honour had already formed up, while ashore a company of troops with a band in attendance had fallen in on the quayside. The Chilean soldiers were a mixed crowd of whites, half-castes, and blacks, attired in blue coats with scarlet facings, white trousers, and gaudily decorated shakos.

The commandante, who was accompanied by the alcalde and a staff of brilliantly uniformed officers, was awaiting with true Castilian punctiliousness the appearance of the captain of the *Olive Branch*, and directly the latter appeared at the head of the companion ladder, the troops stood at attention and the band prepared to play.

"What tune are they going to honour us with?" said Gerald, in an aside.

"Goodness only knows! As we are of no nationality, they cannot——"

Here Stockton's reply was interrupted by the blare of the band, and, to the amazement of everyone on board, the Chilians struck up the British National Anthem.

At the sound of the inspiring note, so thrilling to every true Englishman, the crew of the outlawed ship forgot everything but the fact that they were British-born. Circumstances that had caused the majority of them to forswear the land of their birth were lost sight of.

Standing stiffly to attention, the two groups of officers faced each other, the commandante at the head of the gangway, the captain of the cruiser in front of his staff; nor did anyone relax his rigid posture till the last strains of the Chilian National Anthem that followed the British one had died away. Then, led by Captain Brookes, the commandante was taken to the ward-room, the other officers mingling in an amicable manner, though signs had to take the place of ordinary conversation.

In spite of this difficulty, dinner was proceeded with, Sinclair undertaking the duties of interpreter, while from without came the ceaseless noise of hammering as the work of repairing the damaged shafting was in progress. It was not till after dessert that the commandante—a don with a string of names that showed a connection with the highest families of Spain—learned that he had made a mistake. Up to this point he had imagined that the cruiser was a British man-of-war, in spite of the fact that the green and white ensign floated from her ensign-staff.

"Yes, Commandante da Silva. According to the decree of the principal European nations this ship is a pirate."

"A pirate!" gasped the astonished officer. "What is your intention—to hold the town to ransom?"

"No, señor," replied Captain Brookes. "My intentions regarding the town of Talcahuano are perfectly straightforward and reasonable. As I said before, I am willing to pay all dues and charges, and when these urgent repairs are completed I'll put to sea once more. Meanwhile, señor, you and your worthy alcalde must consider yourselves as my guests till the time of sailing arrives."

"You would hold us prisoners? It is monstrous!"

"Pray do not look upon it in that light," replied Captain Brookes, urbanely. "Rather consider yourselves my honoured guests, though I must admit that my primary object in detaining you is to make use of you as hostages for the good behaviour of the town."

Seeing that resistance was useless, and being assured of courteous treatment, the commandante gave in with a good grace, and, with the alcalde, was provided with accommodation in the captain's own apartments.

This done, Captain Brookes took other steps to safeguard his interests. He seized the railway station and allowed no trains to leave the town, though he was unable to prevent them from coming in from the north. But he realised that it was impossible to completely cut off the town. Lota, a coaling centre, is barely twenty miles south of Talcahuano, and the means at the command of the captain of the *Olive Branch* were insufficient to prevent people from going thither and telegraphing the news of the daring "hold-up "; yet he had gained a decided advantage, and in consequence no time was lost in refitting the *Olive Branch* for sea.

The damage done by the mine was not so great as was anticipated. Two of the three port propellers' shafts were bent, and all three propellers were hopelessly damaged. Fortunately a spare set was carried on board, so the only difficult task was to draw the shafting and straighten it in the Government workshops. On the evening of the second day the work was completed, and preparations were in progress for undocking the *Olive Branch* at daybreak.

"Do you know, Mr. Palmer, that your gallant exploit in clearing the mine-field was unnecessary?" asked Captain Brookes during dinner.

"Unnecessary, sir?" exclaimed the astonished lieutenant. "How so, sir? Were they dummies?"

"No, not dummies, but real live electro mechanical mines. But our Z-rays had, so the commandante informs me, thrown the firing-gear out of action. It's strange that I never thought of that, though had they been contact mines the danger would have remained.

"And now, commandante," he continued, "I must make some slight amends for my conduct in detaining you. To-morrow, all being well, we must part company, but before so doing our paymaster will settle all accounts incurred ashore.

Meanwhile, I ask you to accept this slight token in remembrance of the hurried visit of the *Olive Branch*."

So saying he handed the Chilian officer a morocco case, with a bow that would have put a high-born Spanish grandee in the shade. Within the box was an English hunter, with a solid gold case, on which was the representation of an olive branch set in diamonds. This gift, so unexpected, so overwhelmed the commandante that it was some minutes before he could frame a suitable reply.

To the alcalde Captain Brookes presented a jewelled scarf-pin, bearing a device similar to that of the watch, and it was evident by the expressions of gratitude of the two officials that they would have welcomed a similar visit every day in the week.

In the midst of these courtesies there came a rude interruption.

The officer of the watch rushed into the ward-room, his face pale with excitement.

"We're trapped, sir!". he exclaimed. "There's a British squadron outside the harbour, and they've spotted us with their searchlights. Signal just come from the flagship demanding our unconditional surrender at daybreak."

image: chapter\_14.jpg

#### **RUNNING THE GAUNTLET**

"DON'T distress yourself, Mr. Sinclair," said Captain Brookes, "it may cause my guests considerable uneasiness. Reply by merely acknowledging the signal; no more. Then report to me the earliest moment at which the ship can be undocked."

When the lieutenant had retired the captain turned to his officers.

"This is a strange business, gentlemen," he remarked, briskly, "though we must

be prepared to deal with little unpleasantnesses of this sort. In the first place I did not expect a British squadron in these waters, still less did I think they would worry me with messages of this kind. I can only conclude that a telegraphic message has been sent from Lota or Coronel apprising the fleet of our presence here. In any case they've been mighty smart about it."

"What do you propose to do, sir?" asked Lieutenant Slade.

"Do? Why, trick them. Look here, Mr. Tregarthen," he added, "I'll remember my promise to you, and what is more, it's my resolution not to commit any action that may be regarded as the act of a belligerent. Meanwhile it would be a good opportunity for you to write your report to the Admiralty, for, mark my words, they'll send a boat in the morning."

"I've already done so, sir," replied Gerald. "Do you wish to see the document?"

"No, no; I have the greatest confidence in you, Mr. Tregarthen; it would be a breach of etiquette on my part if I were to supervise your correspondence."

"I have not the slightest objection——"

"But I have, so please say no more on this subject. Ha! Here's Sinclair once more."

"Message dispatched as stated, sir. The bos'n reports ship will be ready to be undocked at midnight," laconically announced the officer of the watch.

"Very good—carry on," was the stereotyped reply.

Captain Brookes appeared to be in no hurry. The dinner seemed unduly prolonged, and it was six bells ere the captain set the example by going on deck.

Away in the offing the powerful beams of the searchlights of the blockading squadron played continuously on the town and harbour, while from the mastheads of the ships the flashing signals blinked incessantly. Judging by the number of beams there were at least four vessels, but of what strength the officers of the *Olive Branch* were unable to ascertain.

In spite of Captain Brookes's coolness a sense of uneasiness pervaded the officers and men of the trapped cruiser, for without resorting to extreme

measures it seemed impossible for the *Olive Branch* to make a bid for freedom.

Punctually at midnight the sound of rushing water announced that the sluices to the culverts were opened, and three-quarters of an hour later the cruiser, now fit to proceed to sea, was warped into the centre of the harbour.

The commandante and the alcalde were sent ashore, all claims settled, and with stores and water tanks replenished, the *Olive Branch* swung easily at her cable, awaiting the dawn.

"Do you recognise any of these vessels, Mr. Tregarthen?" asked Captain Brookes as the sun appeared over the summit of the Andes.

"Yes, sir; the one flying the commodore's broad pennant is the *Niobe*, protected cruiser; the others are the *Melampus*, *Cambrian*, and *Amethyst*."

"All out-of-date vessels on their last legs," commented the captain of the *Olive Branch*. "I suppose they are good enough for the ordinary work on this station; but, by Jove! it's lucky for them that I can keep myself under control. Either that commodore is mad, or he does not know the risk he's running."

"Is it madness to carry out orders, sir?" asked Gerald, quietly.

"Under certain conditions, yes; discretion should always be a proviso in such cases. But here comes a boat."

As he spoke a steam pinnace flying the white ensign came pelting towards the harbour, throwing up columns of spray as she plunged through the agitated water on the bar.

"Ship the accommodation ladder," ordered the officer of the watch, and for the first time in the commission of the *Olive Branch* was this means of gaining access to the cruiser made use of.

"Desire the officer to step down to my cabin," said Captain Brookes, as he turned to leave the quarter-deck.

The pinnace made the foot of the ladder to a nicety, and a lieutenant in full uniform, accompanied by a "sub," came over the side, punctiliously, yet sourly, returning the salute.

"Hello, Tregarthen! What the dickens are you doing aboard this packet?" exclaimed the British officer in undisguised astonishment. "Don't you know me?"

"Yes, of course; it's Blake."

"Right, old man; but again, why masquerading in mufti on this hooker?"

"Because I cannot help it," replied Gerald. "To be exact, I'm a prisoner, though only a nominal one. Also, I'm on leave. In another twenty-three days I am supposed to rejoin the *Calder*, but I'm afraid I shan't."

"We'll rescue you, old fellow, never fear."

"Don't be so sure about that. It's a long story, but this letter will explain matters. Now you had better be off, for the captain awaits you in his cabin, and the officer of the watch looks as if he's growing impatient." So saying Gerald handed the lieutenant the document he had prepared, and withdrew to where Stockton was observing, with mixed feelings, the pinnacle of the *Niobe* as she lay alongside.

image: 19\_compact.jpg

[Illustration: As night fell the searchlights played with unceasing vigilance upon the harbour. Suddenly Captain Brookes turned to Gerald. "Does my compact forbid me using the Z-rays?" he asked.]

In less than a quarter of an hour the English lieutenant, accompanied by Captain Brookes, reappeared on the quarter-deck. Without betraying any of the circumstances of the interview the former went over the side, and the pinnacle steamed swiftly back to her parent ship.

"Well, gentlemen, it's only right that you should know the true state of affairs," began the captain. "I have affirmed that, save for the matter concerning the detention of Mr. Tregarthen and Mr. Stockton, I have never committed any action against the British Government that warrants such interference, and therefore I question the commodore's right to demand our surrender. If, in the execution of my self-imposed duty, I have unfortunately been compelled to take stern measures with the *Afrika*, that quarrel is between the German authorities and myself. On that score I have made my protest to the commodore of yonder squadron."

An hour later the pinnacle returned, the lieutenant bearing a verbal message



from the British commodore that he was there to carry out orders, not to quibble over them, but that he was prepared to put Captain Brookes's protest before the Admiralty in a favourable light should the surrender be immediately carried out.

This message the lieutenant gave in the presence of all the officers of the *Olive Branch*, possibly imagining that the moral effect might be greater.

Captain Brookes's swarthy countenance darkened.

"Go back to your ship, sir!" he thundered. "Inform your superior officer that I scornfully refuse his terms. Here is the *Olive Branch*. *If he wants her, let him come in and take her.*"

A low murmur of applause from his officers greeted this announcement, and once again the English lieutenant returned to his ship.

"I am beginning to repent of our bargain, Mr. Tregarthen," remarked the captain. "But, by Jove! I'll keep my word. We are safe enough for the time being, for they will never dare to enter the harbour without obtaining the consent of the Chilian Government. Meanwhile I can only hope for an on-shore gale and a dark night."

All that day and the night following the blockading squadron remained on the *qui vive*, but on the next morning the gale that Captain Brookes wished for had begun.

Dead on shore it blew, the crested breakers thrashing upon the shallows that flanked the entrance. The sky was overcast, and heavy rain descended incessantly. At about noon the waves became so high that the British ships, already rolling their main decks under, stood out to sea so as to escape the discomforts of an on-shore berth. Nevertheless, as night fell, the searchlights played with unceasing vigilance upon the harbour of Talcahuano.

"Confound those searchlights!" muttered Captain Brookes, then turning to Gerald he exclaimed, "Look here, Mr. Tregarthen, does my compact forbid me the use of the Z-rays? I think not."

Gerald did not know what to reply. This act alone could hardly be termed a belligerent one, and at the same time no permanent damage to *personnel* or material was likely to ensue.

"I'll risk it," continued the captain, and giving orders to clear deck for general quarters, he made his way to the conning-tower.

One glance at the foaming bar where the water gleamed silvery white under the beams of the concentrated searchlights showed him that the plan was a desperate one. A deviation of half a cable's length to port or starboard would be fatal even to the *Olive Branch*, for no vessel could run aground on those deadly shoals and hope to survive.

Suddenly, as if by the touch of a magic hand, the searchlights vanished, leaving only a black expanse of storm-tossed waters. Captain Brookes had made use of the Z-rays.

Slowly the anchor came home from its muddy bed, the engine-room telegraph signalled full speed ahead, and at her utmost possible speed the *Olive Branch* dashed towards the bar, every revolution of her propellers bringing her nearer the alert yet mystified British squadron.

She was running the gauntlet. Perils unseen awaited her ahead and on either hand. Another five minutes would decide her fate.

*(Another long instalment of this splendid serial next month.)*

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**BY PERCY F. WESTERMAN**

Author of "A Lad of Grit," etc.

*ILLUSTRATED BY E. S. HODGSON*

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**Synopsis**

GERALD TREGARTHEN, sub-lieutenant of H.M.S. *Calder*, being on leave, sails from Poole with his old school chum Jack Stockton on board the latter's yacht *Playmate*. In mid-Channel the yacht is run down; the two friends are rescued, and find themselves on board a mysterious cruiser—the *Olive Branch*—commanded by Captain Brookes. Finding that Tregarthen is a British naval officer, Captain Brookes announces his intention of keeping him on board, and, after due deliberation, Gerald decides to fall in with the captain's plans, as far as his sense of loyalty will permit.

Tregarthen is initiated into the secrets of the *Olive Branch*, including that of the deadly ZZ-rays—an irresistible charge of electricity whereby the destruction of a hostile ship can be made at will. Captain Brookes also explains that by the power at his command he hopes to make war so terrible that no nation will venture to declare war; thus universal peace will be assured.

During the voyage south Schneider, the ship's scientist, deserts, taking with him some important plans. He is found on board a German "tramp," and is brought back to the *Olive Branch*, which when this action is reported is branded as a pirate.

Hostilities break out between Chili and Peru, and Captain Brookes determines to intervene. The *Olive Branch* is damaged by a mine, and puts into a Chilian harbour for repairs; but while in dock it is trapped by a British squadron demanding its surrender by daybreak. Captain Brookes is handicapped by a vow never to fire on a British vessel. At midnight when the damage to his ship has been repaired, he makes use of his Z-rays to extinguish the searchlights of the British squadron. Then the *Olive Branch* starts forward at full speed.

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image: chapter\_15.jpg

#### A ONE-SIDED ENGAGEMENT

THRASHING through the chaos of broken water on the bar, the spindrift flying in blinding showers over her knife-like bows, the *Olive Branch* held swiftly yet steadily on her course, steered by her impassive, automaton-like captain.

Every man was at his post, for the cruiser was cleared for action, although it was an understood thing that not a shot would be fired under any circumstances. Yet Gerald wondered, as he stood in the darkened conning-tower, whether the mental strain might prove too great, and whether the temptation to touch one of the deadly levers that were within arm's length might overcome the captain's iron nerve. Could any human being run the gauntlet, receive the fire of four cruisers armed with modern quick-firing guns, and yet withhold the means of offence at his command?

Not a word did Captain Brookes utter. With his hands steadily grasping the electrical steering-gear, his eyes peering through the narrow slit in the armoured walls into the intense blackness of the night, he stood as rigid as a marble statue, save for an occasional slight movement of his hand as he altered the vessel's helm.

To Tregarthen, looking through his aperture in the conning-tower, the task of steering through that mirk of blinding rain and spray seemed an impossibility; but, without a bearing to fix his course, and ignoring the presence of the compass, Captain Brookes seemed to feel his way by a supernatural instinct.

Exactly at four minutes from the time of getting under way a bright flash, followed almost instantaneously by a crash that out-voiced the roaring of the wind and sea, burst from the darkness away on the starboard bow. Then with a long-drawn shriek a 4.7in. shell screamed overhead.

Then another missile, coming from right ahead, struck the sea a bare twenty yards to port, knocking up a cascade of spray that rose high above the foam-flecked waves as it ricocheted into the darkness astern.

Still the *Olive Branch* held on, steering straight for the yet invisible cruiser that had fired the second shot. The firing now became general from the British

cruisers, for the luminosity of the spray churned up by the swiftly moving blockade-runner gave the gunners some knowledge of the position of the on-coming craft.

*Crash!*

A 6in., striking the bow of the *Olive Branch* in an oblique direction, exploded with a deafening report, the flash throwing the outlines of the ship into strong relief.

Then, with a concussion that shook the massive conning-tower to its foundations, a heavy missile landed fairly on the base of the armoured citadel.

Gerald could not refrain from closing his eyes, though the danger of that particular shell had passed, yet he did not move from his position at the look-out slit. The experience gained in the action with the *Independencia* was beginning to assert itself.

Now the blows that ought to have been described as staggering redoubled as shell after shell struck the cruiser's armoured plating, while to the louder detonations of the 6in. and the 4.7in. guns was added the sharp bark of the 6- and 12-pounders. The air that eddied furiously through the apertures in the conning-tower was foul with the acrid fumes, while fragments of glowering metal even found their way into the steel shell.

Suddenly one of the quartermasters who was standing in reserve at the after end of the tower spun round, and blindly fumbling with his outstretched hands, sank lifeless to the deck. As he did so he grasped one of the levers, thrusting it downward as he fell.

Instinctively Gerald turned, disengaged the man's grasp, and replaced the lever; but the mischief was but partly averted. The funnel, windscreens, and the sliding hatches that concealed the boats were beginning to raise themselves above the deck, and, caught by the withering blast, the thin steel plating was riddled like paper.

Then did Captain Brookes shift his position; but it was not on account of the damage caused by the lifeless quartermaster. The *Olive Branch* was drawing within the danger zone of her own Z-rays.

Separating the pointers and springing back to his post, the captain put the helm hard over. Round swung the *Olive Branch*, listing dangerously outwards as he described a short curve with undiminished speed; and at that moment the British cruisers, freed from the irritating influence of the Z-rays, threw their searchlights upon the daring fugitive.

Having gained an offing, Captain Brookes shaped a course to the south'ard, thus presenting the whole broadside as a tempting target to the *Niobe*. Eight of her 6in. guns thundered on the irresistible *Olive Branch* with but little effect, though she reeled as the missiles smashed against her lofty sides. A round from one of the latter's weapons could pulverise the 11,000 tons unarmoured cruiser, yet even in the heat of this one-sided encounter Captain Brookes kept his word.

Then the running fight soon became a hopeless stern-chase, and fifteen minutes after leaving Talcahuano Harbour the report of the last gun died away in long-drawn reverberations like the growl of a beast of prey.

Giving the helm in charge of the remaining quartermaster, and ordering a lieutenant to take command of the conning-tower, Captain Brookes began a tour of inspection. It was too dark to see the amount of damage done on deck, for the arc lamps had been totally destroyed, but below the glow of the incandescent lights showed that the *Olive Branch* had not come scathless out of the fray.

Aft, the lighter side armour, above the lower or turtle-backed steel deck, had not been able to resist the passage of four 6in. shells. Three of the officers' cabins were completely wrecked, the fireproof furniture being shattered into fragments. The distilling plant and the bread-room were also demolished, while for'ard, the impact of two heavy projectiles on one spot had so weakened the armour plate that a third shell had burst under the fo'c'sle, the concussion injuring the delicate mechanism of the wireless gear.

Beyond the loss of the quartermaster the casualties were confined to minor contusions, though most of the crew complained of deafness for the next few days.

"This comes of adopting the principle of passive resistance," commented Captain Brookes. "There's a month's hard work to make all shipshape again."

"I must give the skipper due credit for his word," said Gerald to his chum as they turned in for the night. "I don't think I could have blamed him if he had

kicked."

During the greater part of the following day the *Olive Branch* resumed her southerly flight, though for the space of one hour she was hove-to. Daylight had revealed the extent of the damage done on decks. Practically everything that could be shot away had vanished; the two quarter boats had been swept from their davits, which were twisted into fantastic shapes; the stanchions and handrails, though stowed flat on the deck, were torn like pack-thread, while the steel decks were furrowed in all directions by the glancing blows of the projectiles. As for the conning-tower, it seemed a marvel how any of its occupants could have escaped, for almost every square inch of its massive armour was dented by the heavy shells, and pitted by the hail of the quick-firers.

"Well, Mr. Tregarthen, how do you think the *Olive Branch's* mission of universal peace is progressing?" asked Captain Brookes.

"Since you've asked me, sir, I am afraid that I cannot say it is a success. You see, sir, we fired the first shot in the Chilian and Peruvian set-to, and sent a cruiser to the bottom."

"That I admit. But see the result. By the sacrifice of the *Independencia* the two fleets were prevented from coming to blows. I know these fellows; they fight like tigers, so I can claim credit for saving twenty times the number of poor fellows lost in the Peruvian cruiser, while the war is stopped—that is, unless that British squadron, by driving us away, have encouraged the two Republics to fly at each others' throats."

"That may be so," assented Gerald.

"Here comes Mr. Selkirk, with trouble written on every line of his face as plainly as A B C. Well, Mr. Selkirk, what's amiss now?"

Selkirk, the chief engineer, was a Scotsman whose whole existence seemed bound up in his beloved motors. He was a comparatively young man, with thin drawn features and a crop of sandy hair. When off duty he possessed a vein of dry humour that belied the oft-repeated statement that a man born north of the Tweed can never appreciate a joke; but while on duty his attention to his particular work was beyond reproach.

"No. 3 propeller on port side, sir," he exclaimed. "Wurkin' a wee bit loose."



"Then disconnect the shafting," replied Captain Brookes.

"Will ye no stop the ship awhile, sir. Wi' the shaft at rest the propeller may hauld on, but I ha' ma douts. An' ye'll call to mind we've no spare wan."

"In that case we'll haul it aboard. It's the best thing to be done, Mr. Selkirk. How long do you think it will take the divers to unkey it?"

"A matter of twa hoors, sir."

"Then carry on. I'll give orders to bring-to. Mr. Slade, tell the bo's'un's mate to warn the diving party for duty."

By this time the *Olive Branch* had outrun the storm, though by the erratic behaviour of the mercury there was every reason to expect a repetition of the gale. Nevertheless, there was a long heavy sea on, so that the task of shipping the defective propeller was hazardous both to the divers and the working party on deck.

When at length the propeller was hoisted in over the side Selkirk was on the verge of despair; for one of the phosphor bronze fans was so badly fractured that it was a marvel how the greater part of the blade had not been torn away.

"Yes, it's a bad job," asserted Captain Brookes, "but it cannot be helped. There's only one thing to be done, and that is to make for some secluded creek, take the fan ashore, and weld it. I don't think we can do better than make for Desolation Inlet."

image: chapter\_16.jpg

#### IN THE CLUTCHES OF THE PATAGONIANS

DESOLATION INLET is an unfrequented creek on the northern or Patagonian shores of the Magellan Straits. Save for the occasional visit of a hardy whaler the harbour is rarely occupied. The inlet well deserves its name. Imagine a tortuous

channel of deep water, surrounded by lofty snow-clad mountains that tower to the height of 7,000ft., presenting the appearance of a Norwegian fjord without the beautifying effect of the foliage and pasture land in the intersecting valleys. For, with the exception of a few stunted pines and occasional patches of hardy, thorn-like scrub, vegetation does not exist.

It was early in September, or towards the end of the winter of the Southern Hemisphere, when the *Olive Branch* glided slowly up the placid waters of the creek. Although hardly a ripple disturbed the mirror-like surface, Desolation Inlet is subject to sudden storms that sweep down from the mountains with well-nigh irresistible force, so that their effect upon a slowly moving vessel was extremely dangerous.

Although the lead gave no depth at seventy fathoms during the first ten miles, Captain Brookes dared not proceed with more than a bare steerage way, owing to the extreme irregularity of the bottom of the badly charted harbour; and it was with undisguised relief that the order was given to let go in eight fathoms, with the shore less than two cables' length away on either hand.

image: 20\_menacingly.jpg

[Illustration: A party of natives appeared on the beach regarding the cruiser with obvious amazement. In their hands they carried long slender spears, which they brandished menacingly.]

Hardly had the *Olive Branch* moored when a party of natives appeared on the beach, regarding the huge cruiser with obvious amazement and curiosity. They were tall, muscular men, wild and shaggy in appearance, and scantily clothed in spite of the severity of the weather. In their hands they carried long, slender spears, which they brandished menacingly when a white flag was waved on board the cruiser.

Having lost the small boats in action the only means of communicating with the shore was by the motor cutter and the barge. These two boats were hoisted out by the crane with comparative ease, and a party of men prepared to go ashore for the purpose of setting up a temporary forge for the repair of the propeller.

Gerald and Jack asked, and readily obtained, permission to go ashore, Captain Brookes cautioning them not to wander far from the boat, and not to give the savages any cause for offence; so buckling on their revolvers they took their place in the cutter.

On the approach of the boat, moving swiftly and noiselessly through the water under her well-silenced motors, the natives fled precipitately, till they gained the shelter of a cluster of pine trees.

At length, by dint of signs, one of the savages was induced to come down to the water's edge. This he did slowly, and with manifest hesitation and distrust, but the bait of a piece of copper proved irresistible. No sooner had he obtained possession of the metal than he bolted back to his companions. Two more followed his example, received various blankets, and as promptly fled. Then others summoned up courage, and soon the shore was lined with natives, with every symptom of good-will, who accepted the various presents with the greatest eagerness.

The savages having been pacified, steps were immediately taken to build a forge, and the damaged fan was laid upon a bed of sand so as to receive the molten metal. This work took two days to perform, some of the seamen being lodged in temporary shelters so as to prevent any attempt on the part of the savages to remove the metal under cover of darkness; but so docile did the Patagonians seem that there appeared no necessity for the precaution.

While the welding operations were in progress Gerald and Jack, accompanied by a party of armed men, made several short excursions into the interior. The snow-drifts made walking a difficult matter, while the air was so piercingly cold that the men were especially cautioned against sitting down to rest while on their expeditions, as the result would be fatal.

"I wonder where those poor brutes sleep?" remarked Jack, as the chums trudged wearily through the fleecy mantle that covered the ground to the depth of a foot. "In caves or rough huts, I expect," replied Gerald. "They must be a wiry set. As far as I can make out their food consists wholly of shell-fish, yet they seem to thrive on it."

"What's that over there?" exclaimed Stockton, pointing to a series of snow-covered mounds standing about a foot from the ground on the shores of a small cove or creek.

"Canoes, turned bottom upwards," replied Gerald, after making a lengthy examination through his field-glasses. "And on the other side of the inlet is a small village, though what those people are doing on this side I cannot make

out."

"Perhaps they don't want us to know the position of their village," remarked Jack, as they resumed their way back to the boat, the rest of the party straggling in the rear.

On returning to the landing-place they found that the repairs to the propeller had been completed and the massive casting had already been placed on board the cutter.

"We've been waiting for you the last half hour," observed Mr. Slade, with asperity, for the coldness of the atmosphere and the tedious delay had not improved his temper. "Now then, men, fall in. Number."

On the landing-party "numbering-up" the astounding discovery was made that one man was missing, and further inquiries revealed the knowledge that the straggler was a petty officer named Black, who was known to have accompanied Gerald's party.

"He must have fallen out on the way back to the shore," exclaimed one of the men.

"Well, it's no use standing here—he must be found," said Slade. "As I am in charge of the landing-party, I'm held responsible. Look here, Mr. Tregarthen, will you take command of the cutter, and take the propeller off to the ship? I'll take half a dozen men and go and look for Black."

Jack Stockton also expressed his intention of forming one of the search-party, so leaving twelve men on the shore to stand by the launch, Lieutenant Slade followed the well-defined footsteps through the snow, while Gerald undertook the duty of taking the cutter back to the ship.

Ere the little craft could accomplish her journey a squall swept down upon the harbour with its customary fierceness and intensity. In spite of the fact that the cruiser was riding to a strong ebb tide the strength of the icy blast caused her to swing broadside on and athwart the swirling stream. The motor craft, notwithstanding her comparatively high freeboard, took in water on both sides, nor was Gerald able to bring her alongside the *Olive Branch* till she had gained the comparative shelter of the lee of the cruiser.

Somewhat to young Tregarthen's surprise no one was waiting to receive the boat and its weighty and important cargo, so having secured the cutter to the swinging boom her crew clambered up the wire rope ladders and gained the deck of the *Olive Branch*.

Here they found that, in spite of the hissing shower of hail and snow, the whole of the remaining crew of the cruiser were lining the weather-side of the deck and peering intently ashore.

It was a strange sight that met Gerald's gaze as he crossed the deck and looked in the direction of the landing-place.

Sheltering under the lee-side of the forge and the adjacent temporary buildings were the men of the launch, quite oblivious of what was taking place a bare hundred yards from where they stood, while on the snow-covered plain betwixt the shore and the fringe of the pine trees a scene was being enacted in which those on board the *Olive Branch* were powerless to interfere.

Plunging and staggering across the snow was one of the seamen of the *Olive Branch*, at his heels a score or more of Patagonians, with their long spears poised ready to plunge into the fugitive's back, yet restraining themselves in order to prolong the savage delight of the chase. Against the fleet-footed natives, to whom the soft, yielding snow appeared to offer no obstacle to their speed, the sailor had no possible chance. Once he turned, raised his revolver, and fired, and one of the savages fell. But for the silencer the shot might have terrified his pursuers, but regarding the weapon merely as they would a piece of cold steel, the moral lesson was thrown away.

Evidently it was his last cartridge, for dashing the weapon in the face of the nearest native the man resumed his flight, till within twenty yards of the place where his unsuspecting comrades were sheltering he stumbled.

During his dash for safety the man gave vent to a warning shout; the men had just time to stand to their arms ere the Patagonians were upon them. The issue was not long at stake. The powerful yet silent weapons of the white men drove the savages back to the shelter of the forest.

"Hoist the signal for recall and clear away the for'ard turret," ordered Captain Brookes. "I'll shell the rest of those rascals into smithereens."

Muttering threats of vengeance against the treacherous natives the crew of the launch came over the side. Three of them had sustained slight wounds in the conflict on the shore that necessitated the attendance of the surgeon, though the wounded men submitted to his ministrations with a bad grace. As for the rest of the crew of the *Olive Branch* they besought their officers to lead them on an expedition to rescue or revenge their missing comrades.

To these entreaties Captain Brookes turned a deaf ear. "Too many risks have been taken already," he declared. What he meant to do was to inflict a stern punishment on the savages who had violated the hospitality of their visitors.

"One moment, sir," exclaimed Gerald. "If we open fire with the 6in. guns we'll probably exterminate friend and foe; that is, if our comrades are still alive, as I think they are. I quite agree with you, however, on the impracticability of sending a punitive force ashore."

"By Jove! it's worth trying," cried Captain Brookes, after the young sub-lieutenant had unfolded his plan, and to the astonishment of the rest of the officers and crew orders were given for the *Olive Branch* to weigh and proceed to sea. Twenty minutes later the cruiser had left her anchorage in the inhospitable waters of Desolation Inlet.

image: chapter\_17.jpg

#### GERALD'S RUSE

IT will now be necessary to return to the events that befell the expedition.

Having followed the tracks across the open plain with comparative ease the party plunged into the sombre gloom of the forest, if forest it might be termed, for the trees grew in clumps with frequently a clearing of fifty to a hundred yards between.

"We'll strike an arm of the creek in a few minutes," observed Stockton.

"The sooner the better," replied Slade, shortly, for in the keen biting air talking could only be maintained by an effort. Every breath seemed to lacerate the lungs, while the wind was so bitter that the thick woollen garments worn by the men seemed totally insufficient to withstand the numbing effects of the intense cold.

"It's snowing, sir," exclaimed one of the men. "I've served in the Arctic, and I know what this means. Our tracks will be covered up in a few minutes."

"Well, what do you propose?" asked Slade. "We've no compass."

"Send a man back to blaze the trees before the track is wiped out, sir, then do the same as we advance."

"Very good. Roberts, you make your way back and slice a piece of bark off a tree now and again, so that each mark can be seen from the one nearest to it. Now, look sharp, you others, if we are to find Black alive."

Roberts set out on his return journey, while the rest of the expedition, bending low in order to force their way against the driving hail and snow, proceeded on their way.

Suddenly above the moaning of the wind a blood-curdling yell, issuing simultaneously from a hundred throats, burst upon the ears of the astonished party, and a shower of spears thrown with tremendous force came hurtling through the air.

Three men fell, badly wounded, while two more received slight flesh-wounds. Taken completely by surprise the survivors strove to draw their revolvers, but ere their benumbed hands—rendered additionally clumsy by reason of their thick woollen gloves—could perform their task, the savages were upon them.

Having all his work cut out to defend himself, Jack Stockton could pay no heed to his companions; it was a case of each man for himself. Contriving to obtain a grip at his revolver Jack fired, but the small-calibred nickel bullet, with its high initial velocity, passed through the shoulder of his nearest opponent so cleanly that the muscular savage was unaware that he was hit. Even at that critical moment Stockton wondered whether the weapon had missed fire, till he remembered that it had "kicked," and quick as lightning the thought flashed through his mind that Captain Brookes's methods of exterminating war could not be favourably applied when opposed to savages.

The next instant Jack was grappling with the brawny Patagonian; and though the Englishman was powerfully built and "hard as nails," his strength was like that of a child compared with that of his antagonist.

He felt himself being forced backwards till it seemed as if his spine was on the point of snapping, jagged spear-heads were poised ready to be driven home, and ponderous clubs were whirled above his head.

Then a merciful unconsciousness came upon him and he remembered no more.

Meanwhile Slade, fighting right manfully, had succeeded in flooring three of his antagonists by well-directed blows of his fist; for, in spite of his gloves, the lieutenant's knuckles struck home with sledge-hammer force and precision. For a time it seemed as if he would be able to keep his foes at bay, till a wily savage, stealing up from behind, dealt him a crashing blow with a club. Slade possessed a thick skull in more senses than one, and on this occasion it served its purpose. Under the blow, that would have killed most men, Slade fell senseless in the snow.

When Stockton regained consciousness he found himself lying under the shelter of an overhanging rock, with Slade and one of the seamen lying close to him. Were it not for the actual contact all three would have been dead through exposure to the intense cold. At first he could hardly open his eyes, for the blood that had oozed from a gash in his forehead had congealed and had thus prevented a copious loss of the vital fluid.

Gathered around the prostrate forms of the survivors of the unfortunate expedition were nearly a hundred savages, some of whom were still squabbling over the distribution of their prisoners' effects, for every metal article had been unceremoniously taken from them. Gradually the details of the surprise dawned upon the young Englishman, and he vaguely wondered why the Patagonians had not completed their murderous work. Perhaps he and his companions were being reserved for a lingering death.

After a while Slade began to stir, then, starting to his feet, he stumbled a few paces, and collapsed in the snow. A roar of derisive laughter from the savages greeted this performance, and a pair of dusky giants lifted the lieutenant and dropped him by the side of his comrade.

"Hello, Slade!" began Jack, wearily, but in reply came a torrent of inarticulate



words. The lieutenant was in a delirium. Once he shouted that the men were shirking their task of holy-stoning the decks; then he craved for a cocktail; the next moment begging for a draught of water, till his exhausted body sank beneath the strain and he relapsed into unconsciousness.

Stockton, too, was on the verge of insensibility when a native came running with some news of more than ordinary interest. What the intelligence was Jack could not, of course, comprehend, but the outcome of it was that most of the savages made off, leaving barely a score to watch their helpless prisoners.

One of the native scouts had brought word that the white men's floating village had gone, and the other savages, doubting (as uncivilised tribes invariably do) the word of one of their number, had gone to the shores of the creek to satisfy themselves on that point.

image: 21\_terrier.jpg

[Illustration: Like a terrier let loose amidst a swarm of rats the submarine dashed towards the canoes.]

In less than an hour the main body of the natives returned. They were in a great state of joy and excitement, for the *Olive Branch* had sailed, and the creek was clear, and they could now ferry themselves across and regain their miserable village without fear of molestation. Three litters were hastily constructed by means of spears and lengths of undressed hide, skins being thrown upon them to complete these rough-and-ready contrivances. Upon them the white captives were unceremoniously deposited, and with a weird song of triumph the savages wended their way through the forest to the shore of the creek.

Here a score of muscular arms soon righted the upturned canoes, and on being launched the unstable, yet heavy, dug-outs were so crowded that their gunwales amidships were barely six inches above water. Still scarcely alive to the hazardousness of his position, Stockton found himself lying at the bottom of one of the largest canoes, with Slade and the seaman beside him, both still unconscious and breathing heavily.

Well it was that the storm had abated as suddenly as it had sprung up, and that the ebb tide had now changed to the gentle flood, otherwise the canoes would have inevitably been swamped.

Urged by the powerful strokes of a score of paddles, the craft in which Jack lay shot ahead of the other canoes, its crew giving vent to a long-drawn song as they

kept time with their quickly flashing blades.

Suddenly the song of the savages gave place to a yell of terror. They dropped their paddles, stood upright in their fragile craft as if paralysed by a nameless horror; then, overcoming their immobility, they plunged over the side. Relieved of their weight the canoe rocked violently, while a cascade of splashes from the agitated water descended upon the bodies of the three white men.

Then to Stockton's utter astonishment he heard a hearty voice exclaim, "Here they are, by Jove!" and three brawny seamen took a flying leap from somewhere fair into the bottom of the canoe.

"Be sharp! Pass them out!" ordered a voice that Jack knew so well, and the next moment he found himself being carefully, but swiftly, lifted from the canoe on to the narrow platform of the *Olive Branch's* submarine.

"Thank goodness you're saved!" muttered Gerald, fervently.

The survivors of the unfortunate expedition were carefully passed through the narrow forehatchway, then, scorning to take shelter, Gerald steered the submarine from the skeleton platform surrounding the outside of the conning-tower.

There was no need for the vessel to plunge; her sudden appearance from beneath the waters of Desolation Inlet had struck panic into the hearts of the savages, and now, like a terrier let loose amidst a swarm of rats, the submarine dashed towards the remaining canoes.

Some of the natives let fly a shower of spears in a half-hearted manner. Most of the weapons fell short, while a few glanced harmlessly from the rounded plating of the avenging craft.

Crash! The snout of the steel monster caught the nearest canoe a formidable blow amidships, the dug-out being lifted clear of the water by the impact. The next instant it fell, cut completely in two, and those of its occupants who were not killed or stunned by the concussion were swimming for their lives.

Gerald, in his lust for revenge, resolved to sink the remaining canoes. In their flight the savages lost all sense of strategy and kept together as if seeking comfort in companionship. Thus the submarine's work was rendered still more

easy.

Just as the avenger reached the last of the native craft, a savage, in the courage of despair, took a flying leap upon the tapering bows of the submarine. Then, as agile as a cat, he ran along the narrow, sloping deck-plating, and, ere Gerald could avoid the unexpected attack, the muscular Patagonian grasped the sub-lieutenant round the waist.

Gerald's shout for aid was drowned by the crash of the shattered timbers of the canoe, and ere he could repeat the cry the native had shifted the grip of his right hand to his antagonist's throat, while with his left he strove to wrench Tregarthen from the narrow platform.

Realising that the moment he relaxed his grasp of the iron rail he was a lost man, Gerald contrived to strike out with his left. Handicapped by the fact that his hands were encased in thick woollen gloves, and that his reach was limited, the blow fell comparatively light. Then he tried to kick his antagonist clear, but at the first attempt the agile black, intent only on encompassing his enemy's destruction, twisted his legs in a crushing embrace round Gerald's waist, while both his sinewy hands were engaged in squeezing the sub-lieutenant's throat.

Tregarthen felt his strength was ebbing, his breath came in quick gasps, and he gurgled in the throat under the relentless pressure. Even in those few moments of peril Gerald realised that once he fell into the sea the submarine would leave him to his fate, plunging onwards till those below could see that by her erratic course she lacked a guiding hand at the helm. By that time it would be too late.

Held in the merciless grip, Gerald's range of vision was limited to the grey steel walls of the conning-tower two feet from his face. Even in the fierce, yet silent, struggle a slight dent in the metal wall exercised an unaccountable fascination till everything grew white and a filmy mist swam before his eyes.

His hands were relaxing their hold, stronger came the succession of heaves as the savage sought to hasten the end. Flesh and blood could stand the strain no longer; the rail seemed to slip from his grasp, and with his antagonist still locked in an unyielding embrace he fell backwards.

Weakened as he was Gerald braced himself to meet the shock of the icy-cold water, but with a jerk that almost broke his ankle he found his leg seized in a vice-like grip, while simultaneously the tenacious hold of the Patagonian was

relaxed. He was dimly conscious of being unceremoniously hauled back to the platform of the submarine, and of Watson, one of the mechanics, making a sudden dart for the steering gear, a heavy spanner still grasped in his hand. Then everything became a blank.

image: chapter\_18.jpg

#### THE CAPTAIN'S REVENGE

GERALD'S ruse had been successful. Knowing that the Indians of Patagonia frequently take prisoners any small parties of the crews of whaling vessels who allow themselves to be treacherously surprised, so as to plunder and afterwards hold them to ransom, he reasoned that the savages would remove their captives to their village directly the *Olive Branch* had left the anchorage. Evidently the natives wished to keep the locality of their village a secret, and only Tregarthen's scouting instincts had given him the clue.

So the submarine, in which were Lieutenant Palmer and the usual crew of that craft, was submersed in mid-channel till the canoes attempted the passage, the result of which was fatal to the savages and nearly so to the originator of the enterprise.

When Gerald came to himself he found himself lying in the fore part of the submarine in the company of the still unconscious members of Slade's force. The fore-hatch had been uncovered to admit the air, for 'tween decks the atmosphere was almost stifling.

"Well, old fellow, how goes it?" asked Mr. Palmer.

"I feel a bit rocky, but I shall be all right in a minute or two."

"Case for the sick bay, eh?"

"No fear; but it was a narrow squeak. I wonder how I managed to shake that brute off my back."

"You didn't. If it had not been for Watson noticing that the boat's head was pointing dead on shore you would not be here. He managed the rascal very neatly by a tap with a spanner, and grabbed you as you were on the point of disappearing overboard."

"Where are we now?"

"Brought up at the anchorage. We've telephoned to the *Olive Branch*, and she's on her way back."

Ten minutes later the cruiser appeared round a bend in the channel, and without undue delay the submarine was made fast alongside her parent ship. Stockton and Slade and the surviving seaman were hoisted over the side and sent below to the sick bay, while Gerald, still feeling the ill effects of his encounter, hastened to make his report to Captain Brookes.

"Excellent," was the captain's comment. "By the bye, you appear to have thoroughly adapted yourself to my views. This is a practical instance of the extermination of war. But we haven't done yet; I'm going to send a charge of dynamite ashore, stow it in the centre of their village, and blow the place to bits."

"Haven't we done enough, sir?" asked Gerald, for, now the excitement of the struggle was over, the appalling nature of the business was beginning to assert itself.

"Enough? No! Be thorough—that's my motto. Look here, Mr. Tregarthen, can you give me one good reason why I should withhold my hand when dealing with these rascals?"

"Suppose the whole tribe be wiped out—where does the warning to the others come in? They won't know who is responsible for the act, neither will they be able to understand why it was done. On the other hand, if we give these rascals a thundering good fright, they will have good cause to remember us, and behave better in the future."

Captain Brookes frowned. For the space of a minute he remained gazing in the direction of the inhospitable shore, then, wheeling swiftly, looked Gerald squarely in the face.

"Mr. Tregarthen, I don't know why it is, but you are the only man on the ship

that dares to thwart my purpose. Nevertheless, I like you for your outspoken manner. Now carry on, and let me know what is your alternative."

"We have not as yet given the ZZ-rays a practical test," remarked Gerald, tentatively.

"Good gracious! The ZZ-rays!" exclaimed the captain, with astonishment. "The only argument in favour of the ZZ-rays in preference to a bombardment is that their action is instantaneous and consequently painless. Is that your idea of mercy?"

"No, sir. In any case we must land a party to search for our missing comrades. No doubt we can also 'round up' the savages, since they won't be in a state to offer much resistance."

"And then?"

"We can land a hundredweight of explosive, place it on yonder rock, which I believe is plainly visible from the village, and take the *Olive Branch* down to the mouth of Desolation Inlet, whence she can explode the stuff by means of the ZZ-rays."

"In the meantime what will the natives be doing?"

"We can leave a party to keep them under guard. I will undertake that task if required, sir."

"You have more faith in the infallibility of my invention than I have," observed Captain Brookes, with a grim smile. "What if I miscalculated the distance and wiped you out instead?"

"With due precautions there is no risk, sir."

"All right, Mr. Tregarthen. Since you are willing I make no objection. Only remember, the men required to guard the prisoners—if we succeed in taking any—must be volunteers, duly warned for the service."

Meanwhile the submarine had been submersed and housed in its accustomed berth; the divers had made rapid progress towards replacing the repaired propeller, and preparations were in hand for the proposed visit to the native

village.

At sunrise on the following morning the launch, with the explosive safely stowed on board, lay alongside the cruiser. Captain Brookes signified his intention of heading the landing-party, which consisted of eighty well-armed men.

"I am going to land on the eastern side of the inlet first," said the captain. "I mean to visit the site of the ambushade. This done, we will cross to the other side and make a survey of the village."

It was some time before the track of the unfortunate expedition could be picked up, since the snow had obliterated the footprints, and none of the survivors were sufficiently recovered to accompany the landing-party.

At length a "blaze" was found, and from that point the direction taken by the former expedition was followed with little trouble.

Although it was practically certain that all the natives who had taken part in the treacherous attack had been completely demoralised, Captain Brookes took no risks. Advanced and rear guards were told off, the men keeping their arms ready for instant use. In addition, the silencers had been removed from the rifles.

"Why are those men halting?" demanded Captain Brookes, as the advance guard came to an abrupt stop.

"They've found something, I think, sir," replied Lieutenant Sinclair.

"Then tell them to continue the advance."

By this means the gap between the three divisions being maintained, the main body arrived at the spot where their comrades had halted; then exclamations of rage burst from the lips of the infuriated seamen, for lying, half covered by a mantle of snow, were the bodies of the victims of the savages' treachery. "Isn't that enough to knock the sickly sentimentality out of the most case-hardened humanitarian?" asked Captain Brookes. "I may be wrong in my opinion, but with the experience of not only today, but of years past, I feel convinced that fear is the only means of keeping these savages in order, and, by Jove, I'll teach them a lesson!"

Having made this unpleasant discovery, Captain Brookes led his men back to the shore, whence they were transferred to the opposite bank of the inlet.

Here they again formed up and marched towards the village, which was cunningly concealed save from one particular direction—namely, from where Gerald had noticed it from the eastern shore of the creek.

image: 22\_detonation.jpg

[Illustration: A terrific detonation shook the ground, and a thick cloud of smoke obscured the view of the pinnacle. In an agony of fear the natives threw themselves face downwards in the dust.]

Detaching a party of twenty men under Lieutenant Sinclair, with instructions to make a detour to the opposite side of the village, so that the savages' retreat would be cut off, Captain Brookes halted the main body till a prearranged signal was given to show that arrangements for surprise were complete.

"Now, forward, my lads!" exclaimed the captain, as the report of a rifle was heard in the distance.

At the double the seamen rushed towards the collection of hovels that formed the Patagonian village. A few of the natives showed fight, but the majority fled, yelling with terror, in the direction of the narrow defile held by Sinclair and his men.

Soon the fugitives were driven back; men, women, and children bolted to their huts, and the work of capturing the natives began.

The savages offered but little resistance as they were seized and securely bound. As for the women and children, they stoically remained with their men-folk and finding that they were not to be put to death—as they fully expected to be—the savages began to lose their sullen manner and to take a faint interest in the seamen's preparations.

On an open space in front of the village the natives were placed—the men, individually bound and roped together as an additional safeguard, sitting on the ground in a circle, with the women and children in the centre.

Meanwhile another party of seamen had carried seven tins of dynamite, each containing 16 1/2 lbs., to the base of the crag that Gerald had indicated—at a distance of a mile and a half from the village—and separated from it by the main



channel of Desolation Inlet.

Gerald had detailed his volunteers for the task of guarding the prisoners, and all the preliminary preparations were now complete.

"Now for a practical test of the ZZ-rays, Mr. Tregarthen," exclaimed Captain Brookes, as he bade Gerald farewell. "It is now 10.30 a.m. At noon punctually I shall liberate the electric current from the *Olive Branch*, at a distance of nine sea miles from yonder crag. You will please remain here, and on no account release the prisoners till my return, which, I hope, will be at 1.30 p.m."

"Very good, sir," replied Gerald, with a salute, as the captain ordered the remainder of the landing-party to fall in.

Meanwhile the divers had been working incessantly, and the propeller was again fit for its task; the anchor was weighed, and the *Olive Branch* once more glided down the waters of Desolation Inlet.

Left in charge of the prisoners Gerald had ample time to reflect upon the action he had taken. In his anxiety to save the savages from extermination he had made a somewhat hasty proposal; and now, with the execution of his plan in progress, the force of Captain Brookes' objections came home to him.

The hitherto untried ZZ-rays might prove themselves far more destructive than their inventor claimed; their radius of action might overlap the area governed by those sinister chequers on the indicator; the distance and direction of the pinnacle from the *Olive Branch* might be misjudged—and then?

Tregarthen glanced at his watch. It was a quarter to twelve.

"Smith!" he called out, addressing one of the petty officers.

"Sir?"

"Pass the word for the men to take off their bandoliers, empty the magazines of their rifles, and stow the cartridges under yonder tree."

Without betraying his surprise at the unusual order the man hurried off to communicate Gerald's instructions. Implicit obedience was Smith's sheet anchor.

"There, I've taken every possible precaution," mused the young officer. "Now things must take their course."

As the minutes slowly sped the tension amongst the seamen increased. Even the savages seemed to have an inkling that something extraordinary was afoot.

Watch in hand Gerald waited till the long hand pointed at a minute to the hour.

"Look!" he shouted, pointing to the distant crag.

The natives, although they did not understand the word, followed the direction indicated, and a tense deathly silence seemed to fill the air.

Precisely at noon a terrific detonation shook the ground, and a thick cloud of dust and smoke obscured the view of the pinnacle. When the cloud had dispersed the rock had completely vanished, only a heap of boulders marking its position.

The effect upon the natives was astonishing. In an agony of fear they threw themselves face downwards in the dust, shrieking and moaning in a most dismal manner. By a pure coincidence the rock that Gerald had selected for destruction had been regarded by the savages as the home of the tutelar god of war, and its disintegration had appalled the superstitious savages far more than any personal chastisement. They realised that the power of the white man was greater than that of the deity whom they regarded as their protector in their treacherous attacks upon harmless trading and fishing vessels that stress of weather had driven into their harbours.

Punctually at the time stated Captain Brookes returned with the rest of the landing-party.

By means of signs the savages were told that they were spared on condition that they refrained from molesting the crews of any ships that might at some future time visit Desolation Inlet. This they seemed to understand, and by gesticulations promised to conform to their captors' commands.

"Cast them adrift," ordered Captain Brookes, then turning to Gerald he continued: "Well, that's done with. There's not much doubt as to the efficacy of the ZZ-rays. But the wireless is now in working order once more, and the first message that I received is one that requires our urgent presence in the Mediterranean Sea. Until I hear further details I had better not say any more, but,

rest assured, Mr. Tregarthen, that compared with our next venture, recent events are mere child's play."

*(To be continued)*

image: 23\_aviator.jpg

[Illustration: Seated up to his waist in water was the aviator, clad in an inflated rubber suit. The engine was lost to view, the tips of the twin propellers just projected above the surface.]

image: 12\_instalment\_image.png

**BY PERCY F. WESTERMAN**

Author of "A Lad of Grit," etc.

*ILLUSTRATED BY E. S. HODGSON*

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### **Synopsis**

GERALD TREGARTHEN, sub-lieutenant of H.M.S. *Calder*, being on leave, sails from Poole with his old school-chum Jack Stockton on board the latter's yacht *Playmate*. In mid-Channel the yacht is run down; the two friends are rescued, and find themselves on board a mysterious cruiser—the *Olive Branch*—commanded by Captain Brookes. Finding that Tregarthen is a British naval officer, Captain Brookes announces his intention of keeping him on board, and, after due deliberation, Gerald decides to fall in with the captain's plans, as far as his sense of loyalty will permit.

Tregarthen is initiated into the secrets of the *Olive Branch*, including that of the deadly ZZ-rays—an irresistible charge of electricity whereby the destruction of a hostile ship can be made at will. Captain Brookes also explains that by the power at his command he hopes to make war so terrible that no nation will venture to declare war; thus universal peace will be assured. During the voyage south a

German "tramp" is boarded for the recovery of some plans which had been stolen by a deserter, and for this action the *Olive Branch* is branded as a pirate.

Hostilities break out between Chili and Peru, and Captain Brookes determines to intervene. The *Olive Branch* is damaged by a mine, and while undergoing repairs is trapped by a British squadron. Captain Brookes is handicapped by a vow never to fire on a British vessel.

By the aid of the Z-rays, however, the *Olive Branch* escapes, though not without sustaining injury. The vessel puts into a creek in the Patagonian coast for repairs. A number of blacks which are encountered at first appear friendly, but afterwards prove treacherous, and to cower them Captain Brookes utterly destroys, by means of the ZZ-rays, a huge rock regarded by the natives as the home of their god of war. Later the captain receives a message which, without disclosing particulars, he tells Tregarthen is to the utmost urgency, and involves immediate action.

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image: chapter\_19.jpg

#### GERALD'S PROMOTION

A WEEK later the *Olive Branch* was once more ploughing the waters of the North Atlantic. Since leaving Desolation Inlet her battered appearance had undergone a great change. The bridge and chart-house had been replaced, but the task of renewing the automatic steering-gear was, for the time being, beyond the resources of the ship. Thus, day and night, one of the quartermasters and two assistants had to take their places at the wheel, instead of merely keeping a sharp look-out as the *Olive Branch*, like an intelligent human being, pursued an unswerving course.

By this time the identity of the hitherto mysterious *Olive Branch* had become common property, and the principal European nations had agreed that she was not to be ignored as a fighting machine. Incidentally, Gerald's report to the

British Admiralty had served a useful purpose, for, unknown to Captain Brookes and his officers, code messages had been dispatched to the numerous ships flying the White Ensign on the high seas, ordering them to abstain from hindering or molesting the cruiser, unless the latter were caught in the act of committing an outrage on British shipping. No doubt Captain Brookes's magnanimous forbearance when he ran the gauntlet from Talcahuano Harbour had much to do with this decision, but, being ignorant of it, the captain of the *Olive Branch* still took precautions to avoid coming into contact with a British man-of-war.

How this was to be accomplished, especially in the somewhat congested waters of the Straits of Gibraltar, through which he must pass in order to gain the Eastern Mediterranean—since the passage of the Suez Canal was out of the question—required careful forethought. News having been received by wireless from one of his agents that several of the Russian Volunteer Fleet were making the passage from Libau to Sevastopol gave Captain Brookes his opportunity; nor was he slow to act. The *Olive Branch* was to be disguised as a Russian vessel.

Accordingly, two huge canvas funnels were rigged up; an additional mast with a dummy wireless installation was erected; a calm day afforded the opportunity of painting the ship a greenish hue, similar to that adopted in the Imperial Russian Navy; the name Ekaterinoslav, conspicuously written in Slavonic characters, graced her stern, while the blue cross of St. Andrew on a white field floated from the ensign staff.

"I think that will pass muster," observed Captain Brookes. "But, by Jove! I hope we won't encounter a stiff breeze, or our make-believe funnels will sweep the deck."

"It will give the show away if they do," rejoined Lieutenant Sinclair. "We've guyed them as firmly as it is possible to do, and even now they are whipping before the wind."

"We must ease down a bit. I intended to in any case, so that we can slip through the Straits in a decorous manner. Will you please tell the engine-room to slow down to fifteen knots, and then stow and secure the windshields."

At sunset the *Olive Branch*, which was running in a northerly direction off the southwest coast of Spain, altered her course to S.E., and boldly stood in towards

the historic Straits, so as to pass midway betwixt the batteries of Gibraltar on the north and Ceuta on the south, or African, shore.

The evening being warm, Gerald Tregarthen appeared on deck accompanied by Jack Stockton. The latter was making rapid progress under the skilful care of Dr. White, and though the wound had proved a severe one, no complications had arisen.

"That's Cape Tarifa," observed Gerald, as a fixed red light became visible on the port bow. "We ought soon to pick up the white light on Europa Point. But, by Jove! Jack, I hardly like this phase of the proceedings. Once we are in the Mediterranean, how are we to get out again if this blockading business is continued? It's all very well dodging a few cruisers, though, mind you, it was a fine performance; but when it comes to having to tackle the whole of the British Mediterranean Fleet, that's a rather tall order."

"But we seem to be slipping through unobserved."

"After the fashion of a crab entering a crab-pot—it's on the return trip that we have to pay toll. This disguise will serve us for the present, but the first appearance of the *Olive Branch* in her natural guise will set the whole of the Mediterranean Fleet about our ears."

"If they——"

Jack's sentence remained uncompleted, for with the suddenness peculiar to the Straits a vicious squall swept down from Carnero Point, taking the *Olive Branch* full on the broadside. Instantly the two dummy funnels disappeared overboard, where, held by the wire rope guys, they became gigantic drogues or floating anchors, against which the action of the rudder was powerless.

Then as swiftly as it had arisen the squall subsided.

Captain Brookes was, as usual when in a tight place, ready for all emergencies. Ordering the motors to be stopped lest the propellers should foul the straining canvas, he gave word for the bo'sun's mate to pipe the watch to clear away the wreckage.

Lustily the men sprang to their work, axe in hand, but, ere a dozen blows had been struck, the dazzling rays of a searchlight picked out the *Olive Branch* with



the utmost precision.

"A cruiser," remarked Captain Brookes, calmly. "Carry on, men; then general quarters."

As he sprang towards the conning-tower the searchlight was switched off and a masthead signalling lamp began to "call up" the motionless *Olive Branch*.

"Acknowledge," ordered the captain, shortly; and in reply a lamp from the bridge began its succession of rapid short flashes.

*"What ship is that?"*

"It's no use bluffing them, Tregarthen. I'll show my true colours, and if they've any regard for their own safety they'll sheer off," remarked Captain Brookes, and turning to his signalman he ordered him to reply:—

*"The cruiser 'Olive Branch.'"*

Almost without a moment's hesitation the intercepting vessel signalled:—

*"Is Lieutenant Tregarthen on board?"*

"Ha, Mr. Tregarthen, you're promoted, I understand. Allow me to congratulate you," said his temporary "chief."

An affirmative reply having been given, the British cruiser—for British she undoubtedly was—continued:—

*"I wish to communicate; am sending boat."*

"They can't do us much harm while the boat's alongside," commented Captain Brookes. "Nevertheless, we must take precautions. A few revolutions with the port propellers, if you please, then carry on with the work of clearing away the wreckage."

Hardly had the accommodation ladder been rigged when the sound of oars could be heard, and the outlines of a cutter could be discerned as it approached the side of the *Olive Branch*.

"Two communications, sir; one for the officer commanding this ship, the other for Lieutenant Tregarthen. Will you please favour me with an acknowledgment in each case?" announced a lieutenant as he came over the side.

"I trust you will honour me with your presence in my cabin," replied Captain Brookes affably, and, as the party of officers moved towards the companion, he continued "Might I be inquisitive enough to inquire how you were so ready with your message?"

"Merely the result of a general order, sir," replied the lieutenant of H.M.S. *Galatea*, one of the latest super-Dreadnought cruisers. "Since your marvellous display of speed one never knows where you might turn up next. We happened to be the vessel that stood in your way."

There was a marked difference between the respective manners with which Captain Brookes and Gerald received their communications.

The former calmly and deliberately cut the flap of the envelope with a paper-knife, while his subordinate tore his with almost feverish anxiety.

Gerald's contained a copy of a general order, in which it was stated that Sub-Lieutenant Gerald Tregarthen had been promoted Lieutenant in His Majesty's fleet; and, further, that he was appointed for special duties for an indefinite period, thereby proving that My Lords were both willing and anxious for him to continue his stay on board the *Olive Branch*, although they hesitated to say so in plain words. Nevertheless, the communication lifted a great load off Gerald's mind, although in his excitement he could not fully realise his good fortune. Meanwhile Captain Brookes had completed the reading of the letter addressed to him. Not a sign did he give of its effect, but, inscrutable as the Sphinx, he carefully selected a quill, pointed it, and began to write.

Gerald had before remarked that these pens were the only obsolete articles on the ship. Captain Brookes, past master in the art of modern appliances, had a peculiar liking for quills; and it was with almost pre-Victorian punctiliousness that the captain penned his reply. This done, he carefully sealed the envelope with wax and handed it to the British officer with a courteous bow.

Then, having waited till Gerald had written his acknowledgment, he broke the official ice by requesting the lieutenant of the *Galatea* to partake of a bottle of choice old Madeira.

For nearly half an hour the midnight reception continued, and though the conversation was mainly small talk, Captain Brookes noticed that his visitor was keenly taking in his surroundings, though, the captain reflected, there was little information to be gleaned in that cabin that would prove of use to a stranger.

By the time the *Galatea's* cutter had returned to her parent ship the work of clearing away the debris was accomplished; and with a courteous interchange of signals the two vessels separated, the British cruiser heading towards Gibraltar Harbour, the *Olive Branch* tearing at forty-five knots towards the vast tideless waters of the Mediterranean.

Shortly before eight bells on the following morning all hands, save those whose absence was absolutely necessary, were mustered on the quarter deck.

As Gerald emerged through the companion he noticed that the Russian Ensign no longer floated aft, but held ready to be hoisted was the green and white flag that the *Olive Branch* claimed as her own.

"There's something in the air, Jack," he whispered to his chum.

The officers and men had mustered with anxious faces. They knew that a communication of some import had been received from a British cruiser, but the vaguest details of its contents were missing.

Presently Captain Brookes, in full uniform, came on deck, striding proudly like a young bantam, as the point of his scabbard clanked across the metal plating. Walking as he did between, yet slightly in advance of, two tall lieutenants, his gait would have appeared ridiculous had he been other than the captain of the *Olive Branch*; but there was a determination in his bearing that outweighed his comparatively diminutive stature and his pompous walk.

As eight bells were sounded the ship's ensign was hoisted, all hands standing rigidly to attention as was their wont. Then, taking from his pocket the document that he had received overnight, Captain Brookes began to read its contents.

*From My Lords executing the office of Lord High Admiral of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels on the High Seas to the officer commanding the cruiser (nationality uncertain) "Olive Branch."*

SIR,—You are hereby informed that, as far as His Majesty's Government is concerned, the decree of piracy issued against you, dated 29/8/—, is cancelled, provided that you and the vessel you command abstain from committing any act of violence against any of His Majesty's subjects, ships, buildings, or other

properties of the Crown.—(Signed) BALDERSTOWE, Secretary to My Lords, etc., etc.

For a few seconds following the conclusion of this announcement absolute silence prevailed. The officers were too phlegmatic to allow themselves to express their feelings with acclamation; the men took longer to grasp the meaning of the declaration. When at length its significance came home to them, the seamen burst into a prolonged cheer.

Thoroughly loyal to their chief, the officers and crew had realised that the captain's policy had brought them into dangerous paths; nor could they forget that they were Britons by birth. But now the amnesty had been received the load on their minds had been removed; they could pursue their plans with a good grace.

"You see, my men," exclaimed Captain Brookes, "there's more in this than the British Admiralty feel inclined to put into writing. We are recognised as an important factor in preserving the world's peace. Nay, I will go farther. Should Great Britain in her hour of trial require our assistance—and events seem to show that clouds are already gathering on the political horizon—the *Olive Branch* will not hesitate to range herself on the side of the champion of true liberty.

"Now occurs the opportunity of informing you of the *Olive Branch's* present mission. For some considerable time past there have been signs of an approaching rupture between Turkey and Greece, and events have proved that the trouble between these two States has almost invariably ended in European war.

"I have every reason to believe that a secret treaty exists between Greece and Russia, whereby the Russian Black Sea fleet will force the passage of the Dardanelles directly the first shot is fired between the Greeks and Turks; while, on the other hand, Austria and Italy will support the Hellenes. It naturally follows that the Russian troops will swarm over the Carpathians. Under the existing understanding between Germany and Austria the former country will not remain passive while Muscovite armies are massing on her eastern frontier; nor is it unreasonable to suppose that France, ever burning to wipe out the indignity of losing Alsace-Lorraine, will side with her old ally, Russia.

"This conflict between Greece and Turkey must, therefore, be nipped in the bud. The encounter between the respective fleets must not take place; and it is

the *Olive Branch's* duty to prevent it."

Another outburst of cheering greeted the conclusion of the captain's speech, and the men were dismissed.

As Captain Brookes was about to descend the companion, Selkirk, the chief engineer, came towards him.

"We're running verra short of fuel, sir," he reported. "A matter of twa days will clear us oot o' the last drap."

"That's serious, Mr. Selkirk."

"If she'll take a mixture of lubricating and paraffin maybe I'll screw another four hoors out o' the motors, sir; but the——"

"Very well, Mr. Selkirk. Economise as much as you can; meanwhile I'll see what's to be done."

Captain Brookes realised the gravity of the situation. At half speed it would be just possible to reach Malta, but it was deemed inadvisable to claim the hospitality of a British dependency at this early stage of reconciliation.

On the other hand, the *Olive Branch* would soon be in a state of comparative impotence, since the running of her dynamos from which her offensive and defensive power was derived, would be seriously affected by the under-fuelled motors.

Consequently, Captain Brookes decided to take a bold step; he would shape a course for the Straits of Messina, intercept one of the many oil-tank vessels plying between Baku and the French Mediterranean ports, and by fair means or foul take possession of her cargo.

## THE AIRMAN

JUST before dawn the *Olive Branch* gained the northern approach of the Straits of Messina. Away on the starboard quarter glimmered the lights of the Sicilian town of Milazzo, while well down in the northern sky a faint ruddy glare betokened the position of the smouldering fires of Stromboli.

"There's Cape Faro," observed Sinclair, pointing to a headland that loomed against the pale diffusing light. "We'll soon be in the thick of the shipping."

"The sooner the better," rejoined Lieutenant Palmer. "The chief has just been informed that we can only keep going another two hours."

"Port light showing, sir," shouted the look-out, as a faint red star moved slowly from behind the intervening headland.

"Be careful not to excite suspicion," cautioned Captain Brookes, as she gave a warning blast on her syren. "Ask her to make her number."

A reference to the code-book showed that the stranger was the British steamer *Bletchley Hall*.

"Done this time!" grunted Sinclair, as the *Olive Branch's* helm was altered to show her red. Nor was the second venture more successful, the vessel in this case being the *Pluton*, from Zante to Castellamare.

Then, in order to economise their precious fuel, the *Olive Branch's* engines were stopped. As the sun rose, however, a tramp, emitting dense volumes of oil-fed smoke, laboured slowly through the Straits. The practised eye of Captain Brookes regarded her with satisfaction. "If that's not an oil-tank, I'm a Dutchman," he exclaimed.

Unsuspectingly the tramp gave her name, port of clearance, and destination, and the nature of her cargo—crude petroleum. Then, to the astonishment of her skipper, the *Olive Branch* made a peremptory signal for her to heave to.

To give the Russian credit he did not immediately accede to this demand. Smoke poured from the tramp's funnels in increasing volumes as she altered her course with the intention of seeking safety in flight. As well might a hedgehog seek to outpace a dog, for, with the last of her fuel the *Olive Branch's* motors

worked up to a speed of thirty knots, while a solid shell, passing twenty yards in front of the tramp's bluff bows, caused her to stop and reverse her engines.

"Pipe away the cutter," ordered Captain Brookes. "Mr. Palmer, you will please take charge—you know your orders, I presume?"

"Yes, sir," replied the lieutenant.

As the cutter ranged alongside the tramp's rusty sides her captain, a tall, broad-shouldered, heavily bearded Slav, began abusing the intruders, cursing them in a medley of all the seafaring epithets of Europe.

"Belay there!" exclaimed Palmer. "Don't worry, old fellow! All we want is some oil."

"Then you'll haf to want," replied the irate skipper, who spoke English with tolerable fluency.

"We mean to pay you a fair rate."

"No, no—I will not sell."

"Then we must make you."

"Pirate, eh?" sneered the Russian. "Me report you, an' you'll go so," making a rapid circle with his thumb and finishing with an upward jerk. "What's the name of your sheep?"

"The *Olive Branch*—isn't that good enough for you?" retorted Palmer, beginning to lose his temper.

The effect of this announcement was almost magical. The crew of the tramp, mostly fair-haired Finns, disappeared from her bulwarks, while the captain hastened to leave the bridge and lower a rope-ladder over the side.

Thirty seconds later Palmer and six of his men were in possession of the Russian vessel, and the cutter was sent back to the cruiser. Then, carefully manoeuvred, the *Olive Branch* came alongside the tramp and the work of spoliation began.

The hoses were already connected up, and under the action of six powerful centrifugal pumps the precious oil was transferred to the tanks of the *Olive Branch*, till six hundred tons completed the carrying capacity of the cruiser.

This done, Captain Brookes made out a draft in payment and handed it to the Russian skipper, at the same time making him a present of a case of whisky, which the man received with an ill grace.

"We may as well give him a taste of the Z-rays, just to show there's no deception," remarked Captain Brookes as the *Olive Branch* showed her heels to the tramp.

"Will the rays not effect the submarine cable between Reggio and Messina?" asked Gerald.

"What matters? If they want an explanation there are the subjects for theory," replied the captain, waving his arm in the direction of the invisible Etna. "Volcanic disturbances, eh?"

The Z-rays were accordingly released for ten minutes, during which time the *Olive Branch* had passed the renowned Scylla and Charybdis of the ancients and was heading towards the port of Catania, sixty miles to the south'ard of the Straits.

"Wreck ahead, sir," reported the look-out.

Glasses were instantly levelled, and an object was discovered that at first sight appeared to be a small sailing craft lying on her beam ends.

"If that be the case, she's a rum sort of sailing boat," remarked Stockton. "She has a sail set on her keel as well."

"It's a monoplane," announced Captain Brookes. "The airman has come to earth on the water, to perpetrate an Irish bull. Stand by there, for'ard!"

Orders were given for the *Olive Branch* to reduce speed, while the crew prepared for salvage work. In the course of a few minutes the distance had decreased sufficiently for the wrecked aeroplane to be plainly visible to the naked eye. Although it owed its buoyancy to the fact that two cylindrical aluminium floats were attached to the chassis, the disabled monoplane was



deeply submerged. The engine was lost to view, the tips of the twin propellers just projecting above the surface, while the extremities of the planes dipped to each successive swell.

Seated up to his waist in water was the aviator, clad in a partially inflated rubber suit. He had already seen that aid was approaching, and with the utmost deliberation he had taken an air-tight case from his pocket. From this he drew a huge cigar, which he proceeded to light with an automatic lighter, puffing away with the greatest unconcern, as if a plunge into the sea in a monoplane was an every-day event.

"Steady on your helm, there," cautioned the captain, as the huge hull glided slowly to leeward of the wrecked aeroplane; then leaning over the rail he hailed "Ahoy, there! What's the length of your planes?"

"Fifteen feet," came the reply.

Noiselessly one of the cranes swung outboard; the block with its electrical grappling device was lowered, and engaging the framework fairly amidships, held it in a vice-like grip. The next instant the monoplane was swinging in the air, a cascade of water and oil pouring from every point of its complicated framework.

"You've come to grief, I see," observed Captain Brookes genially, as the airman slipped from his seat on to the deck of the cruiser.

"No need to tell me that, sir," replied the stranger, speaking with a pronounced American twang. "I guess I'd give a dollar or two to find out how she busted up. First time I've known an engine of the Maxfield Universal Gold Star Motor Company, of Petersburg, Pa., to play that low-down trick. But here's my card, sir: Sidney P. Flew, of New York City, and of Portland, State of Oregon; until a few minutes ago, on tour from Queenstown to Cairo by monoplane. What ship is this, sir?"

"You are on board the *Olive Branch*," said Captain Brookes, taking the piece of pasteboard.

"What, that durned pirate? Wal, if I ain't come out on top after all. Shake, sir! I'm that downright fortunate that I feel like pinching myself in case I'm fooling myself."

"Then you have heard of the *Olive Branch*?"

"Heard of her? Why, the whole of Europe and the United States have been talking about her. When I left New York the last words my pa said to me were, 'Sidney, young fellow, mind that durned *Olive Branch* doesn't snap you up.' 'I wish she would,' says I. 'It would be the stunt of a lifetime, and you would be the proudest man in Broadway if you knew your son set foot aboard that vessel.' And now, here I am."

"Well, your wish is gratified, though I don't know whether your expectations will be realised, Mr. Flew," replied Captain Brookes, hardly knowing what to make of the young man's verbosity. "Meanwhile one of my officers will take you below. The hospitality of the *Olive Branch* is at your service for a few hours at least."

"No need of refreshment at present, sir. Had breakfast at Cosenza not two hours ago. With your permission I'll dismember my machine and overhaul the engine before the salt-water plays the mischief with it. Durned if I can cotton to it! The motor was going like a clock, when all of a heap it stopped. Ignition all to blazes. So down I planed, like a ptarmigan with a broken wing."

"I think I can explain it," observed Captain Brookes. "I was compelled for certain reasons to let fly an electrical current, and unfortunately for you, your monoplane came within its influence."

"More luck!" exclaimed the American, enthusiastically. "Sidney P. Flew, of New York City and Portland, fired at by the electrical guns of the world-renowned cruiser, *Olive Branch*. What a heading for the New York Herald."

"He's a harmless young enthusiast," remarked Captain Brookes to Gerald, as the aviator turned his attention to the rescued monoplane. "You might take him in hand and show him those parts of the ship that are of no particular importance. As soon as his craft is all ship-shape, we'll start him on his journey. By the bye, I hear that the Turkish fleet is still in the Golden Horn, and that nothing is likely to transpire for a few days. What do you say to a run across to Malta?"

"I should be glad of the opportunity, if no inconvenience is caused."

"There will be none. Sinclair is going, so if you care to take your friend, Stockton, now's the opportunity. The cutter will take you into Catania, whence a

steamer plies regularly to Valetta."

Tregarthen and Stockton had barely fifteen hours ashore at Malta, but not a minute was wasted. Gerald had a previous knowledge of the island, and was thus able to pilot his chum. His chief object in making the trip was to procure a lieutenant's uniform. Now that the Admiralty had given the sanction to Gerald's presence on the *Olive Branch* he felt he could with propriety wear the uniform of his rank. So directly he landed at Valetta he hurried to a naval outfitter's, where by dint of promises of liberal payment he prevailed upon the Maltese tailor to have the uniform ready at the expiration of twelve hours.

"There's no time to be lost if we are to stop this business," was Captain Brookes's greeting on Gerald's return. "The Turkish fleet has cleared the Dardanelles at last. Turn in and take a good night's rest, for I'm sure you want it."

"One moment, sir—how's the airman?"

"Oh, he's a nuisance. Makes out he can't get his engine to work smoothly. I believe it's only an excuse to hang on. However, it can't be helped; I can't pitch him out at a minute's notice, so I've had the monoplane unrigged and stowed away beneath the armoured deck. After this business is over we can land him if he's still unable to fly. Look, there he is, talking to Palmer. By the bye, he seems very fond of that young fellow. Now, off you go, Mr. Tregarthen, for by sunrise to-morrow we may be cleared for action."

image: chapter\_21.jpg

#### THE MISSING WIRELESS GEAR

THE narrow waters of the strait between Negropont and Andros presented an unwonted spectacle to the crew of the *Olive Branch* as they stood at general quarters.

Straining and grinding at their utmost speed of nine knots were four Turkish battleships—the *Azizieh*, *Mahmoudieh*, *Orkanieh*, and *Osmanieh*, while on their

flanks were the cruisers *Abdul Medjid*, *Fezibahri*, and *Hamidieh*, compelled, for defensive purposes, to reduce their speed to that of their consorts. By dint of strenuous exertions—so incomprehensible to the kismet-abiding Turk—the battleships had been cleaned of the deposit of barnacles that had encrusted their hulls during years of idleness in the Golden Horn, and were about to try conclusions with the smaller, yet more serviceable, warships of Greece.

The Hellenic fleet, consisting of the three battleships *Hydra*, *Psara*, and *Spetsai*, and three modern cruisers built by the Italian firm of Ansaldo, did not hesitate to put to sea, and now at less than seven miles apart the rival fleets prepared for the opening stages of the conflict.

At her utmost speed the *Olive Branch* dashed in between the fleets, a huge white flag flying from the truck of a forty-foot spar lashed to her diminutive signalling mast. Then, reversing her propellers, she brought up within three cables' lengths of the Turkish flagship, the *Azizieh*.

All hands on board the *Olive Branch* were now at their stations, only Captain Brookes, Gerald, Lieutenant Slade, the signal bo's'un, and two yeomen of signals remaining on the bridge or within the conning-tower.

"Make the general signal to both fleets," ordered the captain, and hoist after hoist rose to the yard-arm with the utmost celerity.

*From captain of "Olive Branch" to the commanding officers Turkish and Hellenic Fleets:—*

Abandon hostilities and return to respective ports. Every vessel disregarding this order by opening fire will be destroyed.

The Turkish admiral was beside himself with rage. He had heard of the *Olive Branch*, and of her dealings with the Peruvian fleet, but was he, a Mussulman, to be overridden by a Giaour? Slowly the foremast turret of the *Azizieh* swung round, the muzzle of the 9.2 Krupp pointing menacingly towards the distant *Psara*. For quite ten seconds the gun remained thus trained, the admiral still hesitating to give the word to fire.

Then, trained by the manual power imparted by a score of toiling seamen, the turret turned till the muzzle gaped straight at the *Olive Branch*.

"Better take shelter, gentlemen," remarked Captain Brookes, calmly. "The old gentleman yonder seems to be forgetting himself."

Even as he spoke the Krupp opened fire. The Turkish gun-layer, distrustful of the quality of the charge, had allowed for the admitted inferiority of the explosive; but this particular powder was far above the usual standard.

The result was that the projectile, possessing a high initial velocity and a low trajectory, flew handsomely over the *Olive Branch*, although sufficiently close to allow the windage to be felt by those on the bridge as they hastened to take cover.

"For'ard turret: load with Mark 2 projectile," ordered Captain Brookes. Then turning to Gerald he remarked: "Perhaps that gunner lost his head. I'll give them the benefit of the doubt."

The captain's humane consideration was thrown away. The shot had been intentional, and the Turkish admiral, finding there was no reply, prepared for a second round.

"Give it to her!" shouted the captain.

Mark 2 projectiles, though of low bursting power compared with the *Olive Branch's* first quality shells, were not to be despised.

The right-hand gun of No. 1 turret kicked slightly and emitted a slight bluish haze as the projectile screamed on its way towards the Turkish flagship.

The *Azizieh* was an old ship, being built on the Clyde in 1864, yet her 5 1/2in. belt was still capable of standing a lot of hammering; at least, so thought the Turkish authorities.

The 6in. shell took her fairly and squarely amidships, and though the ship was not instantly pulverised—as she would have been had Captain Brookes so wished—her destruction was none the less complete.

A small jagged hole marked the place of entry of the projectile; but on the explosion of the shell it seemed as if the vitals of the ship were thrown high in the air.

Twice the *Azizieh* made a double list, then settling down by the stern she showed that her wound was fatal. With true Oriental indifference the Turks had gone into action without throwing overboard their inflammable gear; even their

wooden boats were still in davits or on the booms, and these were burning furiously.

Calmly the lithe, brown-skinned seamen lowered themselves over the side or plunged into the water. Many were caught by the propellers as the ship, by some inconceivable means, threw her stern in the air and plunged bows foremost beneath the waves, dragging down many of the swimmers in the smoke-enshrouded whirlpool that marked her grave. Then a deafening roar, as the water came in contact with her boilers, gave place to an ominous silence. The *Azizieh* was no more.

That was the end of the action. The rest of the Turkish vessels immediately went about and made off at full speed towards the Dardanelles; while the Grecian admiral, having made a signal thanking the *Olive Branch* for her intervention—an acknowledgment that Captain Brookes deliberately ignored—retired southward.

Thus the near Eastern difficulty was settled with a promptitude hitherto unknown; but, though Captain Brookes was unaware of it, the averting of a European war was not complete. The inevitable struggle was ere long to be diverted through another channel.

"See here, Mr. Tregarthen," remarked the American airman, a few days after this occurrence, "I'd just like to have a look inside that wonderful conning-tower. Can you work it?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Flew; at least, not without Captain Brookes's permission. Why don't you ask him?"

"Thanks, I just won't," was the reply. "Don't mention it to him."

Five minutes later the captain appeared on deck.

"Why is that Yank so keen on knowing what is within the conning-tower, Mr. Tregarthen?"

Gerald flushed with surprise. The perception of the captain of the *Olive Branch* seemed beyond comprehension.

"Don't look so flabbergasted, Mr. Tregarthen. You are not the first person that

fellow has broached on the matter. "However, I've made up my mind to get rid of him at the earliest possible opportunity. He may be all right, but, bluntly, I don't like his inquisitive manner."

image: 25\_downwards.jpg

[Illustration: "Good shot!" yelled several of the officers on the *Olive Branch*. For a full ten seconds the monoplane held on its course, then, lurching like a wounded bird, it swooped swiftly downwards.]

"Inquisitiveness is one of the traits of the American character, sir."

"That I can make allowance for. But why didn't he come straight to me with his request?" Just then Flew, who was promenading the port side of the quarter-deck in company of Lieutenant Palmer, came abreast of the spot where the captain and Gerald were talking. In response to a sign from Captain Brookes the airman crossed the deck.

"How long will it take to get your motor tuned up, Mr. Flew?" asked the captain.

"A couple of hours; why?"

"See yonder land? It is the coast of Syria. I would suggest, Mr. Flew, that you continue your tour from this point. The Syrian and Palestine littoral will no doubt be interesting to you, and, as we are shortly bound for the eastern part of the Mediterranean, this favourable opportunity cannot lightly be ignored."

Captain Brookes spoke genially, but there was a veiled command that the airman could not fail to detect.

"Very good, sir," he replied deferentially. "I guess I'll quit right here."

As a matter of fact the work of assembling the monoplane and adjusting the motor was performed in less than an hour and a half, during which time the *Olive Branch* was running southward at an easy ten knots, keeping a course parallel to the Syrian coast.

"All ready now, sir."

"Then nip below and have some refreshment. By the bye, is this distance too great for your flight to land?"

"Not at all, sir."

"Will you require any of the stanchions to be cleared away?"

"No, I claim I can rise in the air at a less distance and more obliquely than any other aviator. I guess I'll not scratch the paintwork."

So saying, the airman, accompanied by Lieutenant Palmer, went below, where he remained for over half an hour. When he reappeared he was fully attired for his flight, though, protesting that the heat made the device uncomfortable, he would not inflate his indiarubber suit.

Practically all the officers and crew had assembled to watch his departure, the men crowding as far aft as they dared. Shaking hands with the officers, Sidney P. Flew climbed into his seat above the two air-pontoons. One or two preliminary touches, and like a gigantic hawk he was off, amid the hearty cheers of the crew.

While all eyes were fixed upon the rapidly soaring and receding figure there was a sudden commotion, and Lieutenant Palmer, white-faced and staggering like a drunken man, tottered up the companion.

"Stop him!" he gasped. "He's stolen the wireless reciprocators," and without another word he collapsed upon the quarter-deck.

Captain Brookes was one of the first to recover his composure—if indeed, he had lost it.

"To the conning-tower, Mr. Tregarthen. The Z-rays."

Gerald comprehended these brief orders. By means of the electric fluid the aviator would be brought down as he attempted to cross the zone representing the minimum limit of the rays. It meant a headlong race for'ard, but the crew automatically cleared a path for the young officer, and with the least possible delay he gained the armoured citadel.

Swiftly, yet deliberately, Gerald set the pointers. There was no answering spark. He tried another and yet another square; still no response. The Z-rays apparatus had been tampered with.

Realising the uselessness of investigation at that critical moment, Gerald tore



aft and reported the occurrence.

Captain Brookes looked in the direction of the retreating aviator.

"Clear away that 6-pounder."

Quickly the gun was manned and a shining copper and steel cylinder thrust into the breach.

"Four thousand yards," sang out Lieutenant Sinclair, who, without waiting for instructions, had taken the distance by means of his pocket range-finder.

"Fire!"

"Good shot!" yelled several of the officers, carried away by their excitement, as, by the aid of their glasses the missile was seen to burst just above the fugitive.

For a full ten seconds the monoplane held on its course, then, lurching like a wounded bird, it swooped swiftly downwards, striking the water with a terrific splash.

"Full speed ahead. A leadsman in the chains," ordered Captain Brookes as he made his way to the bridge.

A few minutes were sufficient to bring the *Olive Branch*, with very little way on, immediately over the spot where the aeroplane had disappeared, the airman's cap and one of the inflated floats still marking the scene of the disaster.

The leadsman made a cast, then as he heaved the buoyed log-line overboard he shouted, "Eighty fathoms."

image: chapter\_22.jpg

## THE TOUCHSTONE OF PERIL

"CLEAR away the cutter; pipe the creeping party. Three grapnels and the necessary line," ordered Captain Brookes; then turning to his officers he continued: "Before we take steps to sweep for the lost gear an investigation ought to be made. Will you, Mr. Slade, inspect the wireless room and report to me? Mr. White, you will please attend to Mr. Palmer, who evidently needs your services. Pull him together as far as you are able, so that he can give some account of this mystery. Now, Mr. Tregarthen, we'll see what's wrong with the Z-rays apparatus."

The fault in the conning-tower was quickly discovered. A small hole had been drilled in the steel column conveying the wires from the batteries to the indicator-board, and a metal rod had been inserted, thus causing a short circuiting of the current.

The mystery was as deep as ever, for how did the miscreant find time and opportunity to make his way unobserved into the conning-tower and proceed to drill the thick metal standard?

"There's hours of hard work in front of us," declared Captain. Brookes. "The disarrangement of this intricate mechanism is far more serious than one can imagine. Whether the ZZ-rays are similarly affected I cannot tell. We must find a clear field to undertake that experiment. However, we can do nothing more at present, as far as the conning-tower is concerned, so now for Slade's report."

"All the reciprocators are missing, sir, except the Plougastel one," announced Lieutenant Slade. "That happened to be in the instrument."

"Is the receiver damaged?"

"No, sir; at least, I was able to communicate with Plougastel."

"That's something to be thankful for," ejaculated the captain, fervently. "Though the loss of these reciprocators is irreparable. It means that we are cut off from all intelligence except by means of our Brittany agent. And now to interview Mr. Palmer."

"Mr. Palmer is now in a sufficiently normal state to be interrogated, sir," said the surgeon. "He is still suffering from the effects of a narcotic—opium by the symptoms."

"Very good, Mr. White," answered the captain. "I'll see him in his cabin."

Lieutenant Palmer, looking utterly miserable, staggered to his feet and saluted as his captain entered.

"Sit down, Mr. Palmer," said the captain, kindly. "Let me hear what you know of this business."

Captain Brookes took a seat and waited for the lieutenant to pull himself together, giving a hasty, yet comprehensive, glance round the room as he did so. The cabin was small and plainly furnished. In addition to the ordinary "fitments," there was a small indicator on the wall which at present was showing a blue light. This signified that the wireless was not in operation, a red light giving the operator warning that his presence was required in the wireless room.

On the table was a coffee pot and cup and saucer, large draughts of this beverage being beneficial in the treatment of opium poisoning; while on the floor stood a galvanic battery that Dr. White had used to a good purpose.

"Now, Mr. Palmer."

"I'm awfully, sorry, sir."

"So am I, but up to the present you've done nothing to be sorry for as far as I can see. Pray proceed."

"There is very little to say," began the lieutenant, simply. "The Yankee came in to my cabin to say good-bye and offered me a cigarette. I remember taking a few draws, then everything became misty, though I have a dim recollection of the man lifting me over to my bunk. How long I lay there I cannot tell, but somehow or the other I managed to open the port. The cool air revived me, and then I saw that the wireless indicator light was out. Naturally I looked towards the place where the key of the wireless room was kept, but the key was missing. Then I realised that I had been tricked, and rushing on deck to give the alarm, I found that *Flew* had already started."

"How were the reciprocators secured?"

"There are four of them, each in a small cylinder, with a steel chain passing through a ring-bolt at one end of each."

"Could they be concealed on his person without being separated?"

"I think so, sir."

"Then that simplifies matters. If he did not sever the chain—and most likely he had no time to do so—they might be grappled for, even if they fell clear during his downward plunge. However, that will do for the present, Mr. Palmer; I'll see how things are progressing on deck."

The cutter had already been launched and was running at a slow speed, barely half a knot, in ever diverging circles around the buoy that marked the spot where the airman had disappeared. Over her stern trailed a stout 3in. rope to which the grapnel was secured.

"What's that place yonder?" asked Stockton, pointing to a distant headland on the Syrian shore, as the two chums stood watching the dragging operations.

"Tripoli," replied Gerald, "so called because it was built simultaneously by the Syrians, Sidonians, and Aradians. It's a pity we can't go ashore there, for the ramshackle old place is full of historic interest. They say there are traces of the siege by the Crusaders early in the twelfth century. It is also—hello, what's happened?"

This ejaculation was occasioned by the sudden stopping of the cutter. Her crew began to haul in the rope, but as soon as the slack was taken up the grapnel obstinately refused to leave the bottom.

"She's fouled something, sir," shouted the lieutenant in charge of the boat.

"What strain have you put on?"

"As much as the rope will stand, sir; we can't get it home another foot."

"Then buoy the rope and haul up the lead," replied Captain Brookes.

The buoy indicating the lead-line was within a few feet of the cutter, and with but little trouble the buoy was transferred from the log-line to the grapnel-rope, and the former was hauled up.

"What have you got?" shouted Captain Brookes, as the heavy weight was lifted over the side of the boat.

Lieutenant Sinclair examined the "arming," or tallow filling the hollow in the base of the lead.

"Looks like iron scales, sir, or something covered with rust."

"Strange substance for the lead to bring up," muttered Captain Brookes; then hailing the boat, "Get out the second grapnel; sound a couple of lengths further out, and report."

The lead was again sent down. This time the cast revealed the presence of a dark ooze at seventy-four fathoms. Then the grapnel was set to work, but after traversing a short distance it became inexplicably entangled in some object. A third grapnel was lost in a similar manner.

"There's something out of the ordinary down below," remarked the captain, as the result of the third dragging operation was announced. "I'm afraid we're beaten."

"One moment, sir."

Captain Brookes turned sharply on his heel and saw Lieutenant Palmer, pale yet self-possessed, standing close to him.

"Well?"

"I'm responsible for this, sir, and I hope to be able to rectify matters. Can I descend in the submarine?"

"The submarine? You must be mad. Do you know the depth? Eighty odd fathoms, representing the tremendous pressure of 224lbs. to the square inch."

"The submarine is tested to 230lbs., sir."

"Much as I esteem your devotion, and much as I value the missing wireless gear, I cannot give my consent."

"Sir, I know the risk, and will take every precaution. With the electric grab there is no need to descend to the extreme depth."

"Mr. Palmer, I know you to be a levelheaded and calculating officer. I'm proud of you. If you will give me your word of honour to work cautiously, I'm willing to withdraw my refusal. Now, pick your crew; five men will be sufficient, and what is more, they must be volunteers, fully acquainted with the risk they are running."

"I'm with you," said Gerald, calmly.

"Thank you," replied Palmer, quietly, holding out his hand, which Tregarthen grasped firmly for a few seconds. It was a simple action, with a wealth of meaning behind it. Both men understood.

The remainder of the volunteer crew were quickly forthcoming. The difficulty was to pick and choose, since every man capable of service in the submarine signified his willingness to take part in the enterprise; but at length Palmer, Tregarthen, and three seamen fell in on the quarter-deck as the heroes of a desperate venture.

image: 26\_submarine.jpg

[Illustration: The searchlight revealed a huge circular turret with a pair of monster guns. Slowly the submarine swung round, the light travelling the length of the huge mass of weed-encrusted iron and steel.]

Captain Brookes addressed them in a few words, urging the men to carefully consider the step they were taking.

"You will," he continued, addressing Lieutenant Palmer, "descend for not more than one hour. If at the end of that time the submarine does not reappear I must take it for granted that some mishap has befallen you—which Heaven forbid. Meanwhile, all of you will do well to take a quarter of an hour's rest. Should any man, during that interval, think better of his decision, he may withdraw."

When the little crew were dismissed Gerald retired to the seclusion of his cabin. What he did during those fifteen minutes no human being knew, though many hazarded a guess that was not far from the truth.

Then, having shaken hands with his messmates and received their good wishes for the enterprise—though the proceedings savoured of a party of doomed men setting out for execution—the five members of the submarine's crew descended to the orlop deck and entered the vault-like cavity of the steel cylinder.

Hardly a word was spoken during the descent, save when, from time to time, Palmer's voice could be heard speaking slowly and deliberately into the wireless telephone to acquaint the *Olive Branch* of the submarine's downward progress.

Circling in wide curves the steel monster plunged slowly downwards. Every moment the pale green light that filtered through the sunlit sea grew dimmer, while as the pressure increased the revolution of the propeller became slower and slower.

At thirty-five fathoms the wireless telegraphy became useless, while the darkness became so opaque that the powerful electric searchlight in the conning-tower had to be switched on. By the aid of its gradually diverging beams Gerald could see a waste of water, boundless, trackless, lifeless. Sixty fathoms. The motor was running most abominably, emitting long sparks as the increased resistance of the water strove to stop the already slow-running propeller-blades.

"What's that?" hissed Palmer, pointing to a thick, indefinite line intercepting the rays of the searchlight.

Gerald looked, then thrusting the vessel's rudder over slightly, he allowed the submarine to glide past the obstruction.

"It's one of the grapnel lines."

"Impossible!"

"Yes, you've forgotten the magnifying power of the water. It shows we are not far out of our course."

"All right down there, Halliday?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Inform me the moment there's any sign of the plates yielding."

"Very good, sir."

The seaman was perfectly cool. Implicitly he trusted the two officers in the conning-tower, though he knew that now at any moment the massive steel structure might be crushed like an egg-shell by the tremendous weight of water without.

Suddenly, at sixty-five fathoms, Palmer seized the reversing lever and brought the forward motors of the craft to a standstill. Both he and Gerald saw a sight that filled them with nameless awe.

It was as if the submarine was heading straight for the summit of a mountain—a mountain of weed and barnacles covering an object that was not the work of Nature—it was the work of man.

Slowly the submarine swung round, her searchlight travelling the length of that mass of rusty, weed-encrusted iron and steel. Now the beams played upon a gaping gunport, its weapon still thrust aggressively forward, as if to repel an attack from above. Now the searchlight revealed a huge circular turret with a pair of monster guns; while beyond towered the fragments of a shattered bridge still carrying its silent semaphores.

Then, faintly outlined in the feeble ray, could be discovered a pair of funnels, both tottering through decay and held in position solely by the stout wire guys; while like a phantom could be traced the outlines of a mast with two military tops.

Already the submarine had gathered stern-way and was backing away from the threatening embraces of the shattered gear that surrounded the wreck, and as the vision faded slowly from their view both officers exclaimed simultaneously:—

"The *Victoria*!"

The two men had seen the melancholy relic of a disaster that, though it occurred twenty years ago, is still regarded as one of the most terrible that has ever overtaken the British Navy. Hidden from mortal eyes ever since the fatal day when the *Camperdown* rammed her, the *Victoria* lay in eighty fathoms of water, and now, by the wildest of coincidences, the submarine of the *Olive Branch* had descended nearly on top of the wreck of the ill-fated ship.



"If the reciprocators have fallen amongst that tangle they are hopelessly lost," remarked Lieutenant Palmer, indicating the position in which the wreck lay.

"That's what the grapnels fouled," added Gerald. "However, as the aeroplane sank its planes would doubtless cause it to describe a spiral-like motion. We may as well investigate all round the wreck. Have we backed sufficiently to turn?"

"I think so," replied Palmer, and ordering half-speed ahead, he thrust the helm hard over.

Seventy-five fathoms; only thirty feet from the bed of the sea. The searchlight was deflected till the lower sector of the ray was intercepted by the blunt nose of the submarine, while the light was of sufficient intensity to cast a faint luminosity over the wilderness of ooze that formed the floor of this marine desert.

"She's standing it all right," exclaimed Palmer, cheerfully. "Not a sign of a weak spot."

"Yes, it's safe enough, I think. Now, keep a sharp look-out."

The elevating planes were now turned to an almost horizontal position, barely sufficient to counteract the small reserve of buoyancy preserved by the submarine; and eddying in great circles the huge steel craft pursued her voyage of exploration.

The searchlight revealed a place of utter desolation. No trailing seaweed served to remind the men of the wonderful submarine pictures that artists love to depict; only a vast field of dark mud, surmounted by fathoms of practically opaque water.

Gerald feared for the success of their search in that maze of trackless ooze, for without a mark from which they might take their bearings the submarine must eventually wander far from the spot where she had descended. He glanced at his watch, it showed a quarter to five. That meant that in another twenty-five minutes the submarine must reach the surface, or Captain Brookes would imagine that some disaster had befallen them.

"How's the air below there?" sang out the officer in charge.

"All serene, sir; the mice are quite chirpy," replied one of the seamen.

"You had better be on the safe side and release a little more oxygen," continued Palmer. "Then stand by with the grapnel."

The grapnel was secured to the outside of the submarine, whence by means of an electric wire it could be lowered and engaged with the object to be salved. Its length was not sufficient to allow the possibility of fouling either the planes or the propeller.

"All ready, sir."

At that moment Gerald's quick eye caught sight of a mass of twisted aluminium bars and canvas. It was the monoplane.

Wedged between the framework was a long, thin object covered with a greyish material. The two officers could hardly recognise the body of the treacherous and ill-starred aviator.

Overcoming their feelings of horror the two men looked for the missing reciprocators. The submarine was now brought to a standstill, her keel resting on the ooze, while her searchlight played straight upon the victim of the tragedy.

"There they are, I believe; do you see those bulges under his coat?" exclaimed Palmer.

"It certainly seems so," replied Gerald. "Now, what do you propose to do?"

"Rise right over the aeroplane, engage the grapnel, and blow the ballast tank."

"Mind you don't overrun it, and get the propeller fouled," continued Tregarthen.

"I'll try not to. Now, here goes."

Slowly the submarine began to rise; the grapnel was dropped, and with an almost imperceptible jar the implement became entangled in the wreck of the monoplane.

"Easy ahead."

The motors, running jerkily in their endeavour to overcome the pressure of water on the propeller-blades, were gradually advanced to their utmost capacity, but still the submarine remained anchored to the bottom of the sea, till with a succession of sharp jerks the little craft wallowed helplessly in the ooze.

"Blow the for'ard ballast tank," ordered Palmer, calmly. "She'll rise like a bird."

Two of the men hastened to pump out the tank, but so great was the outside pressure that they were unable to expel the water. On the contrary, a slender stream hissed through the glands of the pumps with terrific force. One of the seamen, struck full in the face by the jet of water, was hurled against the arched sides of the vessel.

"Belay there!" exclaimed the commander, seeing that more harm than good was likely to result; then turning to Gerald he whispered, "Now, what's to be done?"

"Reverse the planes and try running the engine at full speed astern," suggested Tregarthen, now fully alive to the seriousness of their position.

For a few seconds it seemed as if this manoeuvre would prove successful, though the water hissed through the tightly packed propeller shafting as the blades went astern. Then, with a decided swoop, the submarine returned to her muddy bed.

"That's done it!" exclaimed Palmer, gloomily. "We've lost our slight reserve of buoyancy; don't say a word to discourage the men, but I fear it's all up."

Gerald did not reply. Mechanically he pulled out his watch; it was twenty minutes over the hour.

*(To be continued)*

image: 27\_conflict.jpg

[Illustration: The four men threw themselves on the astonished foreigners, and a desperate conflict ensued.]

[See page [486](#).

image: 12\_instalment\_image.png

**BY PERCY F. WESTERMAN**

Author of "A Lad of Grit," etc.

*ILLUSTRATED BY E. S. HODGSON*

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image: chapter\_23.jpg

**THE CRIPPLED SUBMARINE**

"BETTER switch off the searchlight," said Gerald. "It's doing no good, and we must economise the air."

"There's enough oxygen to last for two hours," observed Palmer; "but we had better try the motors full speed ahead once more. It can't do much harm, and the longer we remain inactive the deeper the boat will sink in the ooze."

But beyond a slight pulsation of the hull the submarine remained in her hazardous position.

"Look here," exclaimed Gerald's companion, hopefully, "why not close the torpedo compensating tank and discharge all the torpedoes? That will get rid of some of our gear."

"What happens to the torpedoes when they have finished their run, provided they miss their mark?" asked Gerald.

"If they have practice-heads they rise to the surface; if provided with war-heads they sink."

"The same as our Whiteheads: the exhaustion of the compressed air actuating the propellers opens a valve that admits water into the air-chamber?"

"That is so."

"Then I'm afraid your plan is useless, for in expelling the torpedoes we are only getting rid of objects lighter than the weight of the water they displace."

"You're right," assented Palmer, ruefully.

"Beg pardon, sir," exclaimed one of the seamen, "but are we hitched up here for good?"

"It looks like it," replied Palmer, almost brutally.

"Then couldn't I go out by the air-lock—I am willing to risk it—and take a line up with me? We've nearly a hundred fathoms aboard."

"Impossible, man; you would be crushed to death."

"We ought to try something, sir; the oxygen seems to be giving out, and the mice are getting torpid."

"I thought we had two hours' supply?"

"So did I, sir, but something's wrong with the stuff."

"We will have to rely on the oxygen helmets, then. Serve them out; it may prolong our lives a few hours, though I know not to what purpose."

Slowly the minutes passed. Illuminated only by the glimmer of a solitary incandescent lamp the interior of the submarine presented a picture of gloomy despair. The crew began to realise that they were imprisoned in a living tomb.

"We must make some attempt to communicate with the *Olive Branch*," exclaimed Gerald, shaking off the growing feeling of apathy and drowsiness by a great effort. "Why not write a report stating our condition, enclose it in one of

the torpedoes, and fire it to the surface?"

"To what purpose?" asked Palmer. "They can't help us."

"It will show them that we've done our best."

"All right, then, though personally I think it a waste of time."

Somehow or other Gerald wrote out a brief account of the vicissitudes of the submarine. This both he and Palmer signed, and enclosed in a practice-head of one of the torpedoes.

The impulse charge was sufficiently strong to eject the cigar-shaped cylinder from the tube, though at the expense of another slight rush of water; then, as there was nothing more to be done, the crew prepared for the worst.

It was a peculiar sensation that came over the doomed men. Apparently paying scant heed to their peril they sat down, with their heads buried in their arms, awaiting the sleep that precedes death. The white mice—the surest means of indicating the presence of impure gases—had long since been lifeless; only the soft purr of the dynamo and the laboured breathing of the men broke the oppressive silence.

How long Gerald remained in a semi-unconscious state he knew not; time and place were alike forgotten; he hardly possessed the power of thinking, and, knowing his fate, he seemed absolutely indifferent to it.

Suddenly a sharp metallic clank caught his ear, but, beyond hearing the sound, Tregarthen paid no heed to it. Yet something was moving across the outside of the massive steel shell. Perhaps, he wondered dreamily, it was one of those enormous submarine animals that exist only under enormous pressure, and whose bodies have from time to time been cast ashore, to the wonder of scientific men.

Slowly the bow of the submarine began to rise. Gerald sat bolt upright; he could scarce believe the evidence of his senses. Higher and higher it rose till his inert comrades rolled sideways upon the steel floor, and began to slide helplessly towards the dim recesses occupied by the motors.

Grasping the lowermost rung of the ladder leading to the conning-tower,

Tregarthen tried to collect his scattered wits in order to find some explanation for the sudden tilting of the helpless boat. Perchance her afterpart had rested over a fissure, and the slimy bed had given way as the hull began to settle down.

Then the sensation of drowsiness began to reassert itself, and the lieutenant felt his grip relaxing, till, just as he was on the point of joining his companions who lay in a confused heap—dead perhaps, but at all events unconscious—a voice exclaimed peremptorily, "Empty your ballast tanks."

It was through the receiver of the loud-speaking wireless telephone that the voice came. It meant that the submarine had been raised several fathoms, sufficiently for the telephone to be used once more.

Staggering up the sloping deck, Gerald grasped the pump lever of the 'midship tank. Thank goodness the pressure had been reduced sufficiently for the powerful pump to act.

With his last remaining strength Tregarthen plied the lever, till at length a ruddy sunset glare streamed in through the thick glass apertures in the conning-tower. The submarine was awash.

Climbing the ladder into the conning-tower Gerald threw back the double-action lock securing the hatchway, but the task of opening the massive steel plate was beyond him. The next moment he was drinking in the pure air, supported by a burly petty-officer who had slid down from the cruiser to the deck of the submarine.

"Hurry up and pass these men out," he heard Captain Brookes exclaim. "Perhaps some of them may be still alive."

Half conscious, Gerald was lifted over the side of the *Olive Branch*, Jack Stockton supporting him with the utmost solicitude.

"A pretty fine pass," he heard Captain Brookes remark. "I did not think that Palmer would disobey orders. And nothing gained, after all."

Gerald stopped, just as he was about to be assisted down the companion ladder, and with a sudden impulse that surprised his chum, he wrenched himself clear and staggered across to where the captain stood.



"No, sir; something is gained after all. The missing wireless gear is strung underneath the submarine."

Then everything seemed to swim around him in a white mist, and but for Lieutenant Sinclair's prompt action he would have fallen headlong to the deck.

"We thought you were all done for when you did not return at the end of the hour," said Stockton next morning.

"So did I," replied Gerald. "But how did they manage to raise the boat?"

"Mainly by a slice of luck, and also through Captain Brookes's perseverance and energy, old chap. Directly we felt certain that something was amiss the captain ordered a couple of hands to the cable-cutting room. The dynameter detected the presence of a very weak current——"

"That must have been after we shut off the searchlight and stopped the motors."

"Well, at any rate, it was sufficient to enable us to fix your position. Three times the grab was lowered without result. During these operations a torpedo came to the surface."

"Yes, we discharged it without allowing the propellers to actuate, so that it would come nearly straight to the surface."

"By jove, it did! I should never have believed it had I not seen the thing jump. It shot nearly twenty feet in the air, missing the cutter by a bare boat's length. Then someone suggested unfixing the head, and within we found your message."

"With that we knew you were still alive, and that the submarine had not collapsed under the pressure of the water, as Captain Brookes had feared. Shortly afterwards the grab engaged, and we found that under a strain of half a ton it was beginning to come home. It was an anxious time, as the cable was only tested to twelve hundredweights, but it held, after all, as you know."

"How is Palmer?"

"Bad. The strain coming on top of the narcotic has played havoc with him. The other men are progressing favourably; but Gerald, old man, where's your shaving-mirror? Then hold it so that you can see the back of your head."

Tregarthen did so, and to his surprise he found that on his dark brown hair was a patch as white as snow, almost the size of a man's hand.

"That's strange, Jack. I remember putting my hand to my head when the boat began to tilt. It's a case of utter funk, I suppose."

"You've something to remember the eighty-fathom dive by for the rest of your natural life."

"I don't want that to remind me," replied Gerald, with a shudder.

"Well, it's all over now, and little harm done; but do you know there was something very remarkable about that message you sent up? You gave an account of everything that happened save one thing—the object of your trip. You never mentioned the missing wireless gear."

image: chapter\_24.jpg

#### **A FRUSTRATED PLOT**

THE recovered reciprocators were none the worse for their prolonged submersion, thanks to the protection afforded by the steel cylinders in which they were encased.

A diver having removed them from the body of the ill-fated airman, the wrecked monoplane was released and allowed to sink once more to the bottom of the sea.

The aviator's body was brought on board the *Olive Branch* in order that it might be given a decent burial, and then it was that an astonishing discovery was made.

The man was not an American. Papers found on him, carefully concealed in the double thickness of his indiarubber coat, revealed the fact that he was the agent of a certain European power, and that it was his intention to find out as much

about the *Olive Branch* as he was able to do. The flight across the Straits of Messina was part of a prearranged plan, and, though his fall into the sea under the influence of the Z-rays was not strictly in accordance with his programme, it materially helped to mature the plot that had all but succeeded.

The damage done to the Z-rays apparatus was considerable, necessitating the removal of the diagram board and the wires between the dynamo and the conning-tower. While this was being done the ZZ-rays were consequently out of action, hence Captain Brookes's anxiety to have the work put in hand without a moment's delay.

In this partially crippled state advantage was taken of the proximity of the Santorin Islands to clear the cruiser's under-body of the marine deposit that was already beginning to have an appreciable effect on her speed.

Practically the whole of these islands are of volcanic origin, sulphur springs, being strongly in evidence around the shores of Port Megalos, while the water possesses the property of killing and removing in less than thirty-six hours the weeds and barnacles that adhere to a ship.

"What do you say to a run ashore, gentlemen?" asked Captain Brookes of several of the officers on the afternoon of their arrival. "I'm told the crater is very interesting."

"I, for one, will be very glad of the opportunity, provided I can be spared," replied Sinclair.

"And I," exclaimed Gerald, Stockton, Temple, and Slade in chorus.

"Very well, only be careful not to go too close to the sulphur springs, and beware of loose stones rolling down the mountain. You will be practically in sight of the ship the whole time, so keep a good look-out in case I have to make a signal for recall."

Two hours later, by dint of much exertion and considerable agility, the party of officers gained the edge of the crater. For some time they remained looking at the scene of desolation.

"What's that, by Jove!" exclaimed Jack Stockton, pointing to an elongated yellow object swaying in a deep hollow a few hundred yards away. The others

looked in the direction indicated.

"It's an airship—one of the Zeppelin type," said Gerald. "What on earth is it doing in this part of the globe?"

"I wish I'd brought my marine glasses," remarked Sinclair. "This looks like an interesting discovery. She's anchored, I think."

"Ay, and there are some men coming this way; they've just descended by a rope ladder. I wonder if they have spotted us?"

"I don't think so. Look here, you fellows, they mean mischief! Suppose we take cover and watch their little game?"

The only shelter worthy of the name was afforded by a clump of withered thorns. Foliage there was none, but by lying flat on the ground and keeping behind the thick uncovered roots, the officers could follow the movements of the men of the mysterious airship.

Evidently the clump was the objective of the strangers, since from it they could command a view of the *Olive Branch* without appearing on the skyline. The new comers were three tall, bearded men dressed in a brown uniform. One carried a revolver in a pouch, the others were apparently unarmed; all had field-glasses slung over their shoulders.

Unsuspectingly they stopped at the clump of thorns, only a few tangled branches separating them from Gerald and his comrades. Out came their glasses, and with them glued to their eyes the chance of detecting the concealed officers was materially lessened.

"Yes, there she is," exclaimed one of the strangers, speaking in a guttural tongue that both Gerald and Sinclair were conversant with. "Adolphe was right this time."

"Looking at her from here, sir, one would not imagine her to be such a formidable ship."

"Appearances are deceptive, Captain Dorge. However, there she is, and now is our opportunity. Once we settle with her our chances against England are wonderfully improved."

"Will forty kilos of the explosive be sufficient?"

"It will wipe her out of existence. We must be sharp, for the moon rises at two."

"If we blunder?"

"There will be no blunder. I'll bring the 'Voertwards' immediately above her, and drop to within thirty metres of her deck. They will never expect an attack in this harbour, especially from the sky."

Gerald's grasp tightened on Sinclair's shoulder. That officer nudged Temple in a manner that required no verbal explanation; while Stockton, who had observed the signal, was not slow to comprehend.

"Now!" shouted Sinclair.

Simultaneously the four men sprang to their feet, burst through the intervening bushes, and threw themselves on the astonished foreigners.

The man addressed as Captain Dorge made as if to draw his revolver, but Gerald had already seized him round the waist, while Jack Stockton deftly took possession of his weapon. In an instant he was capsized, Stockton sitting on his chest so that he could only writhe helplessly in the dust.

Temple, a strapping great Scot, had little difficulty in overpowering his antagonist, but Sinclair found all his work cut out in tackling his man. Fiercely they struggled, the stranger striving to grip his adversary by the throat. Failing that, he inserted his fingers in the lieutenant's hair and tried to gouge his eyes out with his thumbs—a continental trick that Sinclair was conversant with.

The first lieutenant's left arm shot out straight from the shoulder, and, taking his antagonist fairly in the chin, sent him reeling a dozen paces ere he fell like a log.

"Now what's to be done?" asked Gerald breathlessly, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Done? Why, drag the bounders back to the ship," replied Sinclair. "We've three important hostages for the airship's good behaviour."

"Easier said than done."

"Not when you know the way, but we must look alive, for I see yonder gentleman is recovering from the effects of my knock-out blow. I wonder if the other fellows belonging to the airship have spotted us?"

So saying, Sinclair relieved the two prisoners of their belts, and, ordering the men to stand side by side, he fastened the left arm of one to the right arm of the other by means of the leather straps, tying their thumbs together by means of a piece of thin cord as an additional safeguard.

Meanwhile Gerald and Stockton had raised the semi-dazed officer, while Temple brought up the rear with the captured revolver well in evidence.

It had taken nearly two hours to climb the crater, but the descent occupied barely twenty minutes.

Smothered in clouds of pumice dust, continually dodging enormous boulders that rolled down the mountain side, the officers of the *Olive Branch* and their captives pursued their headlong descent, and on gaining the beach they found that a boat had already been despatched to bring them off to the ship.

"What has happened, gentlemen?" asked Captain Brookes as the party gained the quarter-deck. "I was watching you through my glasses, and could see that you were having an encounter of some sort."

Briefly the "first luff" made his report. The captain's brows clouded.

"This is bad news," he remarked. "Whatever design these people have against Great Britain is evidently a secret. I've been in communication by wireless with our Swanage agent, and he assures us that there is no sign of international complications. However, it's lucky you nipped this little plot in the bud, for I have no doubt that that airship would deliberately violate all the etiquettes of neutrality. I'll ask our prisoners a few questions."

"I am Hans von Rippach," replied the man who was evidently the senior officer of the airship.

"Herr Hans von Rippach, I salute you," rejoined Captain Brookes, without betraying the fact that he understood the nature of the foreigner's reply, though

he shrewdly suspected that his prisoner was a member of the Royal House of a powerful European State. "Might I inquire the reason why you proposed to attack my vessel treacherously in neutral waters?"

"I refuse to offer explanations to a pirate," replied the prisoner, rudely.

Finding that it was useless to attempt to gain further information, Captain Brookes ordered the captives to be removed and confined in a cabin under an armed guard.

"Couldn't we have a smack at the airship, sir?" asked Lieutenant Sinclair. "A six-pounder could be taken ashore and dragged up to yonder ridge without much trouble."

"We might harm some of the inhabitants of the island," replied Captain Brookes. "There's bound to be a crowd gathered around to see the sight."

"I venture to suggest that the crew have kept them at a respectful distance, sir."

"I'll not take the risk. If the airship ascends I'll wing her sure enough, not otherwise. But I mean to get under way at once and head at top speed for English waters. There's mischief brewing; of that I feel certain."

Ere nightfall the *Olive Branch* had cleared Santorin Harbour and was tearing towards the Straits of Gibraltar. The English agent at Swanage was kept constantly in touch by means of wireless, greatly to that individual's annoyance, since he saw no reason for Captain Brookes's continuous messages. But, four hours after clearing the Straits, a wireless was received that caused the blood of every member of the crew of the *Olive Branch* to surge madly through his veins. It was brief and yet to the point: "Triple Alliance has commenced hostilities against Great Britain."

image: chapter\_25.jpg

THE EMPIRE'S ORDEAL

IN the course of a few hours the officers and crew of the *Olive Branch* were in possession of the state of affairs so far as it was possible for their English agent to impart information. Great things were taking place, events of momentous importance, yet with few exceptions the country was kept in ignorance of the initial disasters of the war.

A secret treaty had been contracted between three great European Powers, and so well were the terms of the understanding guarded that the British Foreign Office was absolutely unaware of the existence of any agreement between the countries concerned. Simultaneous "autumn manoeuvres" had been the means of the foregathering of a powerful combined fleet in the Atlantic, where, though away from the recognised trade routes, it was within twelve hours' steaming distance of the south coast of England.

At the same time most of the British warships under the supreme command of Sir Protheroe Hobbes, Admiral of the Fleet, were cruising off the west coasts of Scotland and Ireland, while through unforeseen defects, an unprecedented number were under refit at the home ports. Several events, to which no one at the time attached the real importance, took place during the week preceding the outbreak of war.

A large British-owned vessel entering Portsmouth Harbour with a cargo of Norwegian granite for use on some of the dockyard works, ran aground opposite the Round Tower—the narrowest part of the mouth of the harbour. As she swung round broadside on to the strong flood tide there was an explosion amidships and the vessel sank in ten minutes, completely blocking up the fairway, and consequently "bottling up" six useful units of the British Navy.

On the same day a mysterious outrage took place in Scotland, the centre spans of the Forth Bridge being destroyed by some powerful explosive. This act was wrongly attributed to Anarchists, who had been extremely active of late. Though fortunately there was no loss of life entailed, the consequences were disastrous, since, until the debris was removed, the naval base of Rosyth was completely isolated.

The following afternoon the ambassador of the Triple Alliance left London, and hostilities, without a formal declaration of war, immediately broke out.

Under cover of darkness simultaneous attempts were made by airships upon



the principal naval ordnance magazines of Great Britain. The attack upon Priddy's Hard Magazine failed, mainly through the initiative taken by a young lieutenant in charge of B Y aeroplane at Fort Blockhouse; but the enemy succeeded in destroying the magazines of Bedenham, Chattenden, and Bull Point, though in the last instance the airship dealing the blow was so crippled by the effect of the explosion that she was compelled to come to earth at Saltash, where her crew were immediately taken prisoners.

A small coasting steamer entering Plymouth Sound struck a submarine mine a few cables from the Mewstone, and sank with all hands. It was subsequently discovered that the channel on either side of the breakwater had been strewn with mines, so that ere a battleship or cruiser dare leave the Hamoaze the Sound had to be "swept" as far seaward as a line joining Rame Head and Wembury Point.

Meanwhile the fleet of the Triple Alliance—outnumbering Admiral Hobbes's command by no less than seven Dreadnoughts and super-Dreadnoughts, eleven armoured cruisers, and more than twenty ocean-going destroyers—sought to cut off the British fleet and compel it to give battle. Once the British fleet were destroyed the position of the Empire would be hopeless. Without landing a single hostile regiment her downfall would be only a matter of a few weeks; with her seaborne commerce captured or destroyed England would be starved into submission; the partition of the Empire would follow in due course.

The minute Admiral Hobbes heard by wireless of the outbreak of war, he issued orders for the fleet to steam at its greatest speed straight for the English Channel. A man of undoubted courage and skill, he never hesitated to count the cost; disregarding the disparity of force, he resolved to take the initiative and do his best to win a decisive action.

At daybreak on the day following the departure of the British fleet from Bantry Bay, two of the swift coastal destroyers signalled that the enemy's ships were standing northwest in quarter line.

Unfortunately this information, though correct, was not complete, as a strong division, in line ahead, was steaming parallel to that of the main fleet, though some fifteen miles to the south-west. Thus, should the British admiral of the fleet attempt to break the enemy's line—as he decided to do—he would have to run the risk of being raked by the guns of the powerful division lying hull down on

his starboard side.

Admiral Bloch, in supreme command of the combined hostile fleets, had laid his plans carefully, but he had not reckoned with Captain Brookes, of the *Olive Branch*. Bloch it was who had planned the annihilation of the dreaded cruiser by means of a surprise night attack by one of the latest type of airships.

The crew of the airship had cabled news of the failure of the enterprise, but unfortunately for the enemy, owing to an error on the part of a Greek telegraph operator, the code word for "destroyed" was substituted for that signifying "escaped."

Consequently Admiral Bloch, imagining that all danger from that source was at an end, did not hesitate to meet the British fleet, well knowing that the latter, though powerful, was vastly inferior in numbers to his own.

Meanwhile the *Olive Branch* was tearing across the Bay. Two hundred miles from Finisterre she overhauled a British transport homeward bound. This vessel she promptly warned of the danger ahead, and as the transport turned and made towards Gibraltar her sides were crowded with troops who cheered the formidable cruiser to the echo.

The defects to the *Olive Branch's* electrical gear had been made good ere she passed Gibraltar; the 6in. shells were charged with their powerful explosive; magazines were opened and water-tight doors closed.

image: 29\_events.jpg

[Illustration: "In view of possible events I must ask you to take up your quarters beneath the armoured deck," said Captain Brookes.]

As far as was humanly possible the vessel under Captain Brookes's command was fit and ready for action.

At six bells the dull rumble of a terrific cannonade was heard away to the nor'-west. The van of Admiral Hobbes's fleet was in touch with the enemy.

It was a prolonged yet terrible encounter. The British fleet, advancing in line ahead in double columns, suffered severely as they received the concentrated fire of the hostile ships. It was a running fight at this stage, for Admiral Bloch's main division, relying on its superior numbers, was slowly retiring so as to subject its pursuers to a heavy cannonade at long range ere the second division, fresh for action, converged upon the flank of the British fleet.

In twenty minutes the *British Orion* and *Thunderer* were sunk, while the *Princess Royal*, *Vanguard*, *Inflexible*, and *Foudroyant* had fallen out of line. In spite of their complicated system of water-tight doors they were leaking badly, their powerful centrifugal pumps being barely sufficient to cope with the inrush of water. The *Foudroyant* in particular was in a deplorable condition, being battered entirely out of recognition.

The "lame ducks" must go. Admiral Hobbes could not hazard the rest of his fleet by standing by. The cripples were ordered to make their way as best they might for Haulbowline, trusting to luck to avoid the detached armoured cruisers of the hostile fleet.

In this running fight the enemy possessed a decided advantage in the fact that both torpedoes and mines could be employed, whereas the pursuing vessels were unable to use either.

Nor had they suffered lightly. The huge 20,000-ton battleship *Kronprinz Gustave*, her armoured sides shattered by the 13in. projectiles of the *King George V.*, was slowly settling down by the head. The *Askoldin* and *Trodet*—both regarded as formidable vessels—had already disappeared, while the *Styx*, *Vonderflack*, and *Gelion* had dropped astern hopelessly crippled. These three vessels, finding themselves overhauled by the British fleet, surrendered at discretion. But Admiral Hobbes was not in a position to take possession of the

disabled ships; all he could hope was that his own "lame ducks" would be able to complete the surrender.

Then with a terrific roar a small cruiser steaming about two cables' length on the quarter of the *Donetz*—Bloch's flagship—burst into a thousand fragments. Admiral Hobbes hailed this success with as much delight as if it had been the sinking of one of the enemy's super-Dreadnoughts, for the vessel had been recognised as the *Hekla*, a mine-layer of the most aggressive type.

Thus the losses on the side of the Triple Alliance outnumbered those of the British by one. This, Admiral Hobbes knew, was good, but not good enough. Should the action be continued with the same proportion of losses the allies would come out with a balance of eleven ships to the good—and that without taking into consideration the as yet invisible division of Vice-Admiral Neboff.

By noon the rival fleets, covering a front of eleven miles, were in the vicinity of the Lizard. The British commander hoped that some of the units left at Devonport might make a flank attack on the enemy. His wireless gear had been swept away, and consequently he was cut off from communication with the shore.

Then instead of the expected reinforcement one of the scouts came within signalling distance with the grave news that another hostile division was closing in on the British starboard quarter.

Half an hour later Admiral Neboff's division opened fire.

Admiral Hobbes realised that his position was hazardous in the extreme. Cornered between two powerful fleets he had either to beat an undignified retreat or to fight to the death. Quickly he made up his mind; he would hammer and be hammered as long as a single ship remained afloat.

At this juncture a grey cruiser, cutting through the water at an inconceivable speed, was seen approaching from the south-east. Eagerly, though hardly daring to hope, Admiral Hobbes watched her approach through his glass. As she passed within a mile of the partially disabled *Hertzog* the foreigner imprudently let fly an 11in. shell. The mysterious cruiser returned shot for shot, but one only was sufficient. Like a cardboard box the *Hertzog* appeared to crumple up, and amid a thick cloud of steam and smoke she disappeared beneath the waters.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed the British admiral, fervently. "'Tis the *Olive Branch*."

image: chapter\_26.jpg

#### THE VINDICATION OF THE "OLIVE BRANCH"

FOR three nights preceding the arrival of the *Olive Branch* on the scene of action Captain Brookes rarely left the deck. Content with two hours' rest a day he seemed to be independent of a desire to sleep. Yet the enormous physical and mental strain was beginning to tell.

"I shall have rest in plenty after this business is done; my lifelong task will soon be accomplished," he replied in answer to Gerald's remonstrances. "But now I must see the prisoners personally. Will you please accompany me?"

Outside the cabin in which the officers of the airship were confined stood two armed seamen. On the captain's approach they unlocked the door, and followed their superior into the apartment; but with a gesture they were dismissed, and Captain Brookes and Gerald were alone with the three prisoners.

"Good morning, Herr Hans von Rippach," exclaimed Captain Brookes. "I regret to have to inform you that owing to possible events I must ask you to take up your quarters in a cabin on the main deck."

"Beneath the armoured deck, I presume?" replied the individual who concealed his identity under the Continental equivalent of Mr. Nobody of Nowhere. The man spoke in fluent English, with hardly a trace of a foreign pronunciation. "That means you are going into action?"

The captain assented.

"Might I take this opportunity of expressing my regret for the rude manner in which I spoke to you on my arrival on board?" continued the officer.

"I accept your apologies, sir."

"And to answer your original questions I beg to announce myself as——"

"Prince E. von Bulow von Ratalewis, second son of——"

"Thank you, Lord Stanningborough," rejoined the prince with an air of a practised duellist who has effected a successful counter. "Need I recall our most pleasurable meeting in Vienna in '09?"

"You heard what the prince said?" said the captain, abruptly, as he and Gerald left the cabin after the expiration of ten minutes' conversation. "Please keep this matter to yourself, as I particularly wish to preserve my incognito."

Gerald bowed; he was on the point of replying "Yes, my lord," but, checking himself, he merely answered "Yes, sir." The revelation had momentarily staggered him, for he clearly remembered the case of the mysterious disappearance of Lord Stanningborough early in the second decade of the present century. For the first time he was able to recognise the peer's features in spite of the addition of the torpedo-beard.

Lord Stanningborough had been a prominent member of a committee of Imperial Defence, and had been submitted to a severe criticism for his outspoken utterances at the time of the three-power standard controversy. Even his personal friends treated him as a harmless fanatic, while the Government of the day ignored his well-meant warnings. At last, in utter disgust, Lord Stanningborough announced his intention of undertaking a big-game expedition to Uganda, and within a month of landing in Africa all traces of him had vanished. But Gerald Tregarthen understood; Captain Brookes was to remain Captain Brookes till his life's work was completed.

A bugle sounded "General quarters." From his position in the conning-tower Gerald could see the ungainly lattice-work masts of Admiral Neboff's division showing just above the horizon.

"Independent firing, foremost turret," ordered Captain Brookes, as an 11in. shell from a partially disabled ship ricocheted harmlessly a hundred yards across the *Olive Branch's* bows.

"That's done it," he exclaimed, as the hostile vessel disappeared from view.

"Now for the enemy's flanking ships."

Neboff had witnessed the arrival of the redoubtable cruiser. He had been duped; the *Olive Branch* had not been annihilated but had arrived at a critical moment.

A signal fluttered from the flagship of the vice-admiral's division. Every available 11in. and 14in. gun was to be trained and fired simultaneously at the *Olive Branch* in the hope of sending her to the bottom.

For the space of twelve seconds over fifty heavy shells were hurtling through the air at a velocity of considerably more than a thousand yards a second. But the gun-layers had forgotten one important consideration; they had omitted to make due allowance for the cruiser's abnormal speed, and, with one exception, the projectiles fell harmlessly astern, thrashing the sunlit water into a cauldron of foam.

The shell that struck home—a 14in. missile—simply swept the whole of the afterpart of the *Olive Branch* out of existence. Everything above the armoured deck and abaft the rearmost gun-turret was blown away, the concussion shaking the cruiser from stem to stern.

"The bos'un to sound and report state of hull," ordered Captain Brookes; "then take necessary steps to keep the leak under."

"The range?" he continued, as he bent over the ZZ-rays indicator.

"Fourteen thousand yards, sir," replied Gerald.

The next instant the horizon in the direction of Admiral Neboff's division seemed to be one blaze of dull red fire, a thick pall of smoke rose in the air, and presently the dull revibration of a series of detonations was faintly borne to the ear of the young lieutenant in the conning-tower.

"Hurrah! That's settled their hash," he shouted, carried away by the excitement of the moment. "The——"

The sentence remained unfinished, for, happening to turn his head, he saw the figure of his commanding officer huddled over the indicator-board.

"Hit, sir?" he exclaimed, anxiously.

There was no reply. Gently Gerald lifted the body of the captain and laid him carefully down upon the floor of the conning-tower. Then, in answer to a hurried order, two seamen entered the citadel by means of the armoured spiral staircase, and Captain Brookes was carried below to be placed in the hands of Dr. White.

There was no time to be lost in bewailing the latest catastrophe.

"Pass the word for Mr. Sinclair to take command," ordered Gerald, then, without waiting for the first lieutenant's appearance, he directed the quartermaster to head towards the left flank of the main division of the enemy's fleet.

A hurried glance at the ZZ-ray apparatus showed that this potent means of offence was no longer available.

image: 30\_shattered.jpg

[Illustration: An admiral's pinnacle was approaching the shattered *Olive Branch*. Gerald hastened on deck to receive the distinguished officer.]

The pointers had been kept in position for such a length of time during the captain's collapse that every unit of electricity had escaped. Tregarthen realised that at their utmost capacity the dynamos would have to be working for six hours ere sufficient power was restored to bring the ZZ-rays up to their normal power.

It was to be by gunfire alone that the *Olive Branch* must complete her work of retrieving the fortunes of the day.

"Independent action!" roared the lieutenant through the speaking-tube, for the electrical indicators communicating with the turrets had been disorganised by the concussion of the shell that had burst inboard.

In the space of a quarter of an hour the supreme conflict was decided. The enemy's feint had been changed into a disorderly retreat; many were sunk by gunfire, while the remainder, overhauled by the superior speed of the British fleet, hoisted the white flag.

The naval Armageddon had been fought and won.

"Where's Sinclair?" asked Tregarthen, as the wearied, yet triumphant, crew



came on deck to witness the British warships taking possession of their surrendered foes.

"Down, sir; fatally wounded, I fear."

"And the captain?"

"Dead, sir," answered Dr. White, who was unable to conceal his emotion.

For some moments Gerald could say nothing, so grieved was he at the news. Then he asked, simply:—

"Where was he hit?"

"He is untouched by the enemy's shot; it is a case of heart failure caused by the strain of the last few days, culminating in the excitement of the action," replied the surgeon.

"Pass the word for the officers to come aft," said Lieutenant Tregarthen.

In a few broken words Gerald formally conveyed the news of their great loss, then, producing a document with which Captain Brookes had entrusted him, he read the instructions that were to be carried out in the event of the death or disablement of the captain of the *Olive Branch*.

This done, Tregarthen with his own hands lowered the green ensign and hoisted the blue ensign half-mast in its place, as the British naval regulations forbid the use of the white ensign. Then, gathering the struck colours under his arm, the lieutenant went below to where the body of the gallant captain lay.

All that was mortal of Captain Brookes had been placed on one of the junior officer's bunks, for the senior officers' cabins had been swept away by the 14in. shell. Reverently Gerald covered the body with the green ensign, the most fitting homage he could pay to the memory of his temporary chief.

"Admiral coming off, sir."

Tregarthen hastened on deck to find that a pinnace—one of the few that was still seaworthy, so fierce had been the enemy's fire—was approaching the *Olive Branch*, a Union Jack denoting the rank of admiral of the fleet flying from a

jack-staff in her bows.

With the customary honours Admiral Hobbes came over the side, regarding the shattered quarter-deck of the mysterious cruiser with ill-concealed interest.

Gerald, in his uniform of lieutenant in His Majesty's fleet, stepped forward to receive the distinguished officer, and informed him of the death of Captain Brookes and of his written instructions to hand over the *Olive Branch* formally to the British Government.

"I am not ashamed to confess," remarked Admiral Hobbes to Gerald as they stood in the presence of the great captain, "that but for the assistance of the *Olive Branch* our position would have been hopeless. Now, thanks to Captain Brookes, all danger is at an end, and England still remains Mistress of the Seas. More than that, she will be incontestably supreme for all time. It's a sharp lesson, but an effectual one. All honour to the man who fulfilled his mission, and by one great action made further war impossible."

And standing rigidly at the salute, the veteran admiral paid his homage to the Sea Monarch.

THE END.

Transcriber's Notes:

"THE CAPTAIN, A MAGAZINE FOR BOYS & 'OLD BOYS.'" was a monthly magazine for young boys. It contained articles about how to make things yourself, about schools, photography, and short stories by different authors. The magazines were also published collectively as half-year volumes. In 1911 volume XXV appeared and it included this story by Percy F. Westerman.

This story was published the next year (1912) by Adam & Charles Black, as a novel.

The 1911 edition contains a number of misprints.  
The following misprints have been corrected:

[from beneath, his feet.] >  
[from beneath his feet.]

[I wil hasten to] >  
[I will hasten to]

["I am begining to] >  
["I am beginning to]

Beneath an illustration the following text was found:

[the tips of the twin propellors] >  
[the tips of the twin propellers]

[the companion Selkirk,] >  
[the companion, Selkirk,]

[in the Altantic] >  
[in the Atlantic]

Several words occur with different notation. It could not be established which spelling is correct, so no corrections were made for:

[charthouse]/[chart-house]  
[bos'n]/[bos'un]/[bo's'un]  
[siren]/[syren]

A reversal was detected (but not corrected) in the following fragment: ["destroyed" was substituted for that signifying "escaped."] Following the story-line, the author probably meant to write: ["escaped" was substituted for that signifying "destroyed."]

The plain text file uses underscores to indicate italic text and asterixes to indicate bold.

A contents-list and an illustrations-list have been added for the convenience of the reader.

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