

# The Sea Monarch

## A Thrilling Tale of Adventure under the Most Unusual Circumstances

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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 armored also that he is a prisoner. At length he is taken into the presence of

CAPTAIN BROOKS, 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 Brooks 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."

### CHAPTER VI

#### 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 behavior. 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 300 feet in length and 60 feet 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 45 degrees.

"These are wind screens," observed Captain Brookes. "They are an absolutely 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 traveling 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 vaporizers. 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 armored structure 25 feet in diameter, and barely 5 feet above the upper deck. Around the walls were electrical indicators and a maze of pipes painted in distinctive colors 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 Harbor 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 electric gear is completely disorganized, and, knowing as you do the vital importance of electricity on board a modern man-of-war, you can realize 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-disc 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 revolutionize 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 1,000 feet—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.

## CHAPTER VII

### RUMORS 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 6-inch 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 quarter-deck, 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 colors.

"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 manœuvred

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 6-inch 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 transshipping 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 nor-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 armored 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 ward-room, 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 labors, 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. I am a professor of languages and sciences. You come 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 make me fill ze shells in ze laboratories. I like it rot. 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."

## CHAPTER VIII

### 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-honored 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 free 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.

"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 armored deck.

Being below the waterline 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 colors.

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 signaling 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 Middle-Kerke 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. "I here 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-martialed, 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 re-

"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 6-inch 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 6-inch is more deadly than a thirteen point five shell charged with lyddite. No armor 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 laboring 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 signaling from the shelter of the bridge, sir," he explained. "I couldn't make out the message, and judging by the manner in which they signaled 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 signaling 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 to-night; we will be awaiting you*" read Gerald.

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

## CHAPTER IX

### 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 insure 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-vitæ 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-star-board 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 star-board bow.

"That will do. Keep yonder craft in sight," continued Captain Brookes. "Now, gentlemen, we'll retire. Tomorrow 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.

"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 leaned over the bridge rails and flourished a revolver.

"You pirates!" he drawled. "Stand off, or ne 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 ramp'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 Extermi-

nator 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.

*(To be Continued.)*

