

The Sea Monarch

A Thrilling Tale of Adventure Under the Most Unusual Circumstances

By PERCY F. WESTERMAN

Author of "A Lad of Grit," "The Queen of the Golden Hope," Etc., Etc.

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.

CHAPTER X

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 6-inch 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 the prostrate body, cleared the rail with a single bound, and leaped 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 elec-

trical 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 600 feet. How many rounds from a 13.5-inch 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 6-inch 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."

"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 wind-shields 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 dismantled 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 direc-

tions 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 2,500 feet 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!"

CHAPTER XI

WIPED 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 seaboard 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 Calloa, 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 Chilean 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 4.7 in. 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 6 in. 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, outline 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 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."

"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 Chilean 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 Chilean fleet was sighted, but the victory was an easy, bloodless one. By means of the Z-rays the fleet was demoralized, 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 Chilean 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 Chilean town; he promptly isolated it by interrupting telegraphic communication by means of the ZZ-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, senior, 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, senior."

"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, senior, 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."

CHAPTER XII

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 Chilean 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 14,000 ft.

"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 practical 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 30 ft. in the rear was the tell-tale swirl of the vessel's propeller and the characteristic wake of the submerged 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 50 ft. 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 realized 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 30 ft. in length and 8 ft. 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 4 ins. 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 utilized 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 80 ft., in fact, almost to the bottom of the sea, for I could see the water discolored 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 100 ft, 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 torpedos are fired is similar to that by which the guns are discharged on board this ship. I saw the slender, fish-shaped weapon leaves 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 forward 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 Brooks. "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 Brooke'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

CHAPTER XIII

TRAPPED

DURING the docking of the *Olive Branch* crowds of townsfolk, 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 quay-side. The Chilian 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 realized 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 *Olice 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."

CHAPTER XIV

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

"DONT 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 mastsheads 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 recognize 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 pinnace of the *Niobe* as she lay alongside.

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 pinnace 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 pinnace 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 Brooks, 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.)

