

THE UNION

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THE "UNION JACK"
CONTAINS
A LONG, COMPLETE NOVEL
EVERY FRIDAY.

JACK

THE BLUE BOX MYSTERY



George burst through the flimsy wall, crying: "Liar! Coward! George is here!" Clarice, seeing him, cried out with joy, while Barnard Wildair went white as death. (See this week's exciting complete novel: "The Blue Box Mystery.")

No. 385

The Blue Box Mystery.

A THRILLING COMPLETE STORY.

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

CHAPTER 1.

Getting the Blue Box Aboard the "Berenice"—Gentleman George Watches and Wonders—A Boat with Muffled Oars.

"But how can we get the box aboard undiscovered, captain?"

"That is easily arranged, Danford. How many hands are on the vessel now?"

"Only four, sir—your Chinaman, Mat Sing, two fellows asleep in the fo'c's'le, and the watchman on deck."

Captain Girdwood knitted his brows reflectively, while the man Danford, a great, hulking fellow, with a villainous face, waited stolidly for orders.

"Ah! And who is the man on deck?" asked the skipper, after a pause.

"Johnson."

"What, the fellow they call 'Gentleman George'?"

"That's the man."

"Danford, the fellow is as sharp as a needle; he must be got out of the way before the Blue Box comes aboard. Tell him to take a message to the boatswain at the Silver Swan, and if Antrobus isn't there, to look round till he finds him. That will take him some time," Captain Girdwood chuckled, "as I saw Antrobus take the train for Chatham this afternoon."

"Will Mr. Wildair come along with the Blue Box?"

"I think not. He doesn't wish to be seen. But go now and clear Johnson out of the ship."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

And Danford, the chief mate of the "Berenice," rose, and opened the cabin-door.

The good ship "Berenice" at this time lay off Gravesend. Around her the spars of other vessels at anchor were dimly visible in the darkness. It was a gloomy night; there was no moon, and but few stars spangled the black vault overhead.

The "Berenice" was to sail with the tide, yet nearly all her crew were still ashore in Gravesend.

The unaccustomed liberty surprised none more than the seamen themselves, but Captain Girdwood had his reasons.

The single watchman on deck was a young sailor, who went by the name of George Johnson.

Although he was a thorough sailor, and "pulled and handled with the mariners" without any daintiness, it was not difficult for anyone to perceive that he was superior to his position.

The general opinion in the fo'c's'le was that he had been an officer, and had come down in the world; but this was merely surmise, for even to his most intimate mates George never spoke of his past.

His knowledge, his cleanly habits, and his correct use of the King's English had earned him the nickname of "Gentleman George."

In the fo'c's'le he was looked up to and respected, though he was the youngest member of the crew.

Unlike his shipmates, George seemed to have no friends ashore, and he remained as watchman on the deck of the "Berenice" by choice, while the seamen went to Gravesend to make the most of their unexpected freedom.

The clearing out of the ship naturally excited the young man's surprise; but he made it a rule never to concern himself with other people's affairs, and he did not trouble to think about the matter at all. It was entirely by chance that he came to learn that all was not as it should be aboard the "Berenice."

There was a breeze on the river, and all at once George felt his cap lifted from his curly head by the playful wind. He made a clutch to catch it, and missed, and his headgear went bowling along until it brought up against the skylight of the captain's cabin, which was partly open.

George stepped along quietly, and stopped to secure it. As he did so, a sentence spoken by the chief mate in the cabin below struck upon his ear.

"Will Mr. Wildair come along with the Blue Box?"



The Blue Box, then, contained a human body! George was provided with matches. Hastily he struck one, and then a single horrified word escaped him—"Clarice!"

"PIRATE ISLAND"—COMPLETE. NEXT FRIDAY.

the good ship "Berenice," "was only a little puff compared with what we shall have pretty soon, you mark me!" Antrobus had spent nearly all of his sixty odd years upon the salt water, and he posed as a weather prophet in consequence.

His declaration was pleasing to at least one member of the ship's company. When all was serene and taut, it was impossible for George to find an opportunity of getting at the Blue Box undiscovered. Either Captain Girdwood or the burly Chinaman, Mat Sing, Dauford would be below, or the burly Chinaman, Mat Sing, would be hanging about the cuddy.

But when the stormy winds began to blow, and all hands were called to the deck, then the young sailor's chance would come.

George had, in the interval of waiting, manufactured a wire picklock. At his next visit to the Blue Box he would view its interior. The thought excited him, for a conviction had gradually been growing upon him that the casket held some terrible secret; that a discovery of some undreamed-of horror awaited his eyes.

The prediction of the old boatswain, Septimus Antrobus, was soon fulfilled. The Equator was crossed under a lowering sky, and by the time Cape San Roque lay astern, the "Berenice" was again fighting for her life against the furious elements.

Fully prepared for the storm, the ship rode the heaving waters with the buoyancy of a cork. At first all hands were retained on deck, but when Captain Girdwood felt all secure, he sent some of them below. George and several others went into the forecabin, and Mat Sing, who had quarters aft, descended the companion-way. George saw him go, and did not bless him; but he reflected that, after all, the Chinaman would not be likely to be upon the watch.

The intense darkness, when night closed in, was only slightly relieved by the swinging lanterns on deck. So, soon as he saw his companions asleep, George silently quitted the fo'c's'le, and stealthily picked his way aft. Although there was little rain, the sea spray splashed over the decks, and the planks were wet and slippery. However, by taking time and trouble, he got to the companion safely.

There he had to be doubly cautious. Both the mates, as well as the captain, were at the binnacle. But the deep gloom obscured him. He crawled into the hatchway; fortunately it was not battened down, as he had half dreaded to find it. Then down the ladder, and he stood in the cuddy.

There he remained motionless for some minutes, listening.

There was no light in the cuddy at all, and George could not see an inch ahead of him. Above, the wind roared through the rigging, and howled along the deck. Without, the sea thundered hoarsely against the stout timbers of the "Berenice," filling every corner of the ship with its weird echoes. In the cabins occasional sounds were heard, as loose articles were displaced by the wild rocking of the ship. The strangeness of it all nearly unnerved George Johnson. In every sound he fancied he could detect the footsteps of the Chinaman. Twice he cast hurried glances behind him, fearing to see the glaring eyes of the burly Mat Sing. But he saw nothing. At last, ashamed of his weakness, he collected himself, and passed boldly into the captain's cabin.

He had to feel his way, but the knowledge he had gained during his former visit stood him in good stead. He entered the curtained alcove, and felt for the Blue Box. Ah, there it was, just as it had been two nights before.

George soon threw back the canvas, and had the padlock in his hands. It took him only a minute to pick the lock; then the lid of the mysterious Blue Box opened quite easily.

George's heart beat fast. What was he about to discover? Trembling, he placed his hand within the casket, and then as hastily withdrew it, and reeled backward with a half-suppressed cry of horror.

George Johnson, beneath his fingers, had felt the outlines of a human face!

The Blue Box contained a human body!

Although he had anticipated something of the kind, George was horror-stricken by the discovery.

His worst fears were realised.

Murder, then, had been done! Foul murder, and the victim had been borne away to sea in the Blue Box in order to hide the guilt of the murderer!

But the victim—who was that?

A hideous dread was tearing at his very heart-strings. The Blue Box came from Harley Hall. It had been sent by Bernard Wildair. Bernard Wildair, then, was responsible for what it contained. Was it—was it the body of someone he knew? The face was too soft and smooth to be that of Sir Bertram Masingford. But—Clarice— Surely it could not be!

The doubt was too maddening for George to think of caution. He was provided with matches. He struck one, and bent over the opened box.

His face became as chalky white as that still and set countenance his haggard eyes rested upon.

A face of wondrous beauty—the face of one in the bloom of blooming girlhood, but now waxen pale. The eyes were closed, the long, dark lashes swept the colourless cheeks. The lips were scarlet, as in life; slightly parted, showing pearly brown hair, fresh and glossy. Could it be that she was dead, or did she but sleep?

Upon this face, the face of one he had adored in boyish days, and loved with manhood's love, George gazed spell-bound, and a single horrified word gasped from his trembling lips:

"Clarice!"

The match went out.

And as George stumbled blindly to his feet, a hand stretched forth in the darkness and gripped his throat.

CHAPTER 4.

A Fight in the Dark—The Captain's Tactics—George in Irons.

To George, whom the fearful shock he had just experienced had deprived of his self-possession, it seemed for an awful instant that it was the hand of the dead that clutched him.

But as the fierce grip clenched, he realised that he was assailed by a living man of powerful strength.

The superstitious panic in his heart died away as quickly as it rose, and, with his fighting instincts aroused, he was himself again at once.

Reaching out with both hands, he seized hold of his unseen assailant, and with a furious wrench overthrew him.

The unknown crashed upon the floor, perforce losing his hold upon George, who, leaving him there, darted from the alcove.

In the brief space of the rencontre, the situation as it stood was presented to George's mind with the swiftness and vividness of a flash of lightning.

It was, of course, Mat Sing who had discovered him, through his reckless striking of the match, or some sound he had made.

What course would Captain Girdwood follow when he knew that his secret was discovered?

It seemed but too clear that if the young man did not escape from the cabin before the conspirators could come to the aid of the Chinaman, he would never leave it alive.

Not that George was especially concerned for his own safety. It was the desire for vengeance, full and bitter vengeance for the foul crime that had been enacted, that actuated him. Once on deck, he would proclaim the villainy of the captain; every man on board should know that a murdered girl was being carried to the South Sea in the Blue Box.

Grief and rage and vengeance maddened the young sailor, and it was dangerous work to bar his path then. But the Chinaman—a faithful watchman, scoundrel as he was—was bent upon preventing his escape. As George rushed out into the cuddy, the burly Celestial pursued him with the eagerness of a famished tiger. Up the companion-way sprang George; but ere he could gain the deck, the clutch of the Chinaman upon his ankle dragged him back.

Gritting his teeth, George kicked out savagely with his free foot, and Mat Sing received a blinding blow in the face; but he did not relax his hold. Growling out Oriental curses, he tightened his grip, and with a terrible tug tore George from the steps. Together they rolled to the bottom.

Sprawling there in the darkness, again the sinewy hand of the Chinaman sought the Englishman's throat. George, whose blood was up, struck him savagely, and threw him off. But as he sprang up, Mat Sing's clutch fastened upon him indomitably, and at the same time the Chinaman screamed out something in his native language. George understood that it was a signal to the captain, whose footsteps he heard almost immediately descending the companion.

"Mr. Gwynne! Help! help!" shouted George.

He put his whole strength into that shout, and it rang above the roar of wind and wave.

Captain Girdwood had heard the Chinaman's call, and knew that someone had discovered the secret of the Blue Box, and that Mat Sing was seeking to prevent the discoverer from escaping with his knowledge.

Filled with rage and fear, the skipper rushed down the companion, Gwynne, who had heard without understanding the Chinaman's call, looking after him curiously.

A desperate deed might have been done there in the dark, but for George's presence of mind in calling to Gwynne.

He had no time for a second cry, for Mat Sing grasped his throat, and he was compelled to struggle for his life.

Captain Girdwood struck a match, and saw the combatants. There was no time to be lost if George's tongue was to be stilled, for he could hear Gwynne behind him. Seizing the young man round the waist from behind, he overthrew him,

and caused his head to crash upon the floor heavily. George's eyes rolled; a thousand lights danced before his eyes, and he moaned and sank into oblivion.

Captain Girdwood groined his teeth as the second mate came running down the companion. Had not Gwynne been called, how easy it would have been to pitch the insensible sailor out of the cabin window! When he was missed in the morning, it would have been supposed that he had fallen overboard during the storm. But now—he must live. The skipper had to trust to his own cunning to prevent an exposure.

Gwynne hurried down. He guessed easily enough that George had been caught in the forbidden cabin by the Chinaman, and he was anxious to prevent violence being done to the sailor.

He had caught up one of the lanterns which lighted the poop, and the yellow rays fell upon the strange tableau in the cuddy as Gwynne reached the bottom of the steps.

George lay senseless; Mat Sing stood gasping and panting for breath; Captain Girdwood was angry and excited.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked Gwynne. "What has happened to Johnson?"

"He is either mad or drunk," Captain Girdwood answered, lying with the ready skill of an old hand. "I heard my servant call, and came down to find Johnson attacking him like a madman."

"He seems to be stunned," said Gwynne, advancing to the insensible sailor, and looking at him anxiously.

"Yes, luckily, or he might have done murder. Did he attack you in your bunk, Mat Sing?"

The cunningly-worded question was a sufficient indication to the alert Chinaman of what he was required to say. He nodded his pigtailed head vigorously.

"Yes, yes, me wakee, him clutch me thloatee!" he exclaimed.

Gwynne looked at him suspiciously.

"If that is so, Mat Sing, how came you to be struggling so far from your sleeping-berth?" he asked.

"Me tly to escape to deckee; he lun aftel me," readily explained the sharp-witted Celestial.

Gwynne, who saw that the door of the captain's cabin was open, and who guessed the object of George's visit aft, knew well enough that the Chinaman was lying. But before he could speak again, Captain Girdwood said briskly:

"The heat of the line often causes such outbreaks. Johnson has temporarily lost his mind; that is the explanation. But as his insanity seems to have taken a homicidal turn, I must take precautions for the safety of the ship's company. Mr. Gwynne, you may return to the deck. Kindly send the carpenter down with a set of fetters."

"Fetters!" ejaculated Gwynne, giving a start. "Certainly, fetters. What the devil are you staring at?" retorted the skipper. "Is there anything surprising in fettering a dangerous lunatic?"

"I don't believe he's anything of the kind," Gwynne burst out. "Mat Sing is lying when he says Johnson attacked him."

Captain Girdwood looked hard at his second mate. Was Mr. Gwynne in collusion with the seaman who had spied out the secret of the Blue Box? Surely that was not possible!

"How do you know that, Mr. Gwynne?" the captain asked, with ominous calmness.

The mate saw that he had nearly betrayed himself. It would not do to let Captain Girdwood imagine that he was cognizant of George's attempt to probe the mystery.

"It doesn't seem at all likely, sir, at any rate," he said, rather lamely.

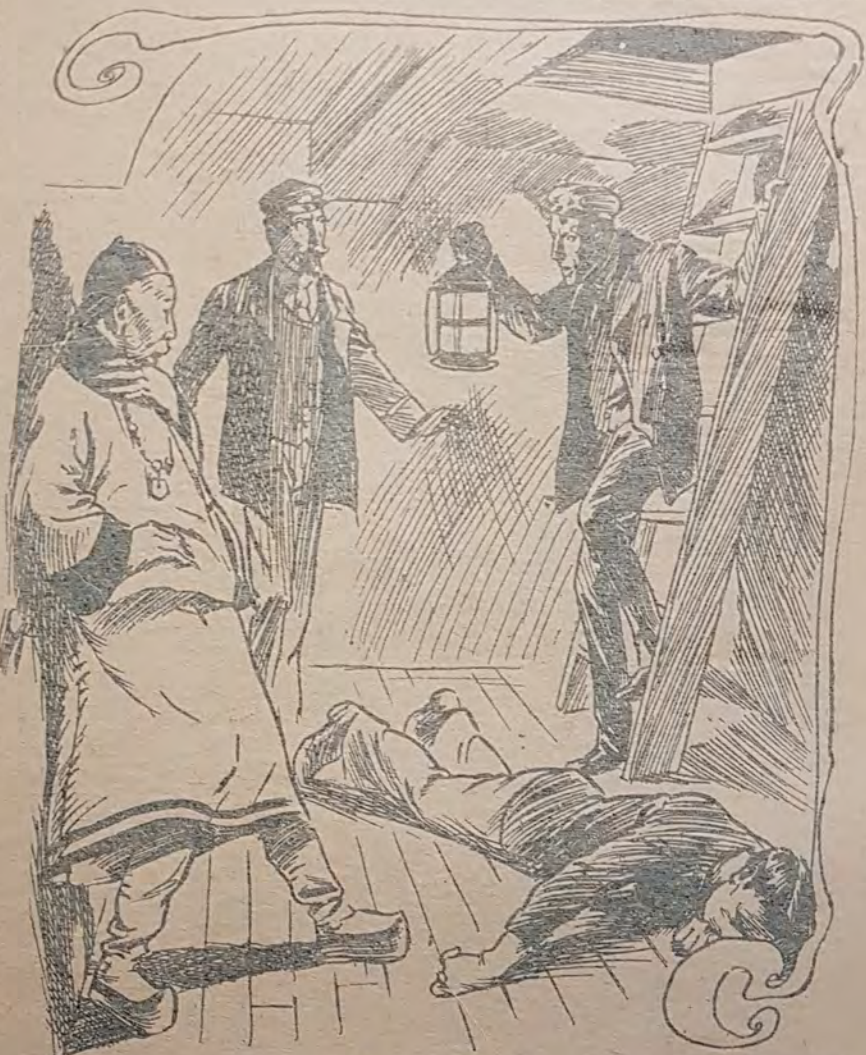
"H'm! Do I command the 'Berenice,' Mr. Gwynne, or do you?"

"You do, sir."

"Then perhaps you'll be kind enough to obey the order I gave you just now," continued Girdwood icily.

Gwynne saluted and retreated up the companion.

He was sorry for George; but, after all, the sailor must take the consequences of disobeying orders. Had he known of the fair form enclosed within the Blue Box, Gwynne's actions would have been very different. But he did not



The yellow rays fell upon the strange tableau in the cuddy as Gwynne reached the bottom of the steps. George lay senseless; Mat Sing stood gasping and panting for breath; Captain Girdwood was angry and excited. "What is the matter, sir?" asked Gwynne. "What has happened to Johnson?"

know; and at present he had no alternative but to obey the captain.

When the second mate was gone, the Chinaman and the skipper looked at each other. In the lantern-light Mat Sing's bruised face looked demonic.

"Me killee?" he asked, in a whisper, touching his clasp-knife with one hand, and pointing to the still sailor with the other.

The captain shook his head.

"Talker if livee," added Mat Sing.

"It can't be done now, man. Murder is a bit too dangerous. If only he hadn't alarmed Gwynne, curse him!" Captain Girdwood viciously kicked the sailor in the ribs. "What evil spirit brought him prowling round here in the

dark, I wonder? Nothing can be suspected in the fo's'le. Has he seen it?"

The Chinaman nodded.
"Boxed open; pickee lockee; sluckee match." hissed the enraged skipper. "Remember, Mat Sing, he attacked you in a fit of violent insanity. We'll cure his insanity for him. By the hokey! I will take care his tongue has no chance to wag! Go now and fasten up the Blue Box, in case of accidents. I'll attend to this second!"

The carpenter came with his tools and the fetters, in a state of amazement. Captain Girdwood knew that an explanation would have to be given to the crew, and he gave it to the carpenter to be carried on to the fore-castle.
"Hurry up and clap them on, Maxwell," he said. "If he comes to, we may never get him ironed."

"Wot's he bin doin', sir?"
"He has nearly murdered Mat Sing. Poor fellow, he is not exactly to be blamed! It is the heat of the line that is the cause of it. I found him here raving, and Mat Sing nearly strangled and at the point of death."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Maxwell, never doubting for a moment the explanation of the captain, which George's presence in the cuddy, where he had no business, seemed to bear out. "Lucky you came in time to stop him, sir. I should never have thought Gentleman George the chap to go cranky. But then he's only a kid, and the line turns older heads than his'n sometimes."

"Handle him gently," added the captain.
"I will, sir, though this ain't a gentle sort of a job," the carpenter said ruefully. "Poor George!"

When the fettering was finished, Captain Girdwood dismissed the carpenter, and then dragged George into his cabin. As the sailor now showed signs of returning consciousness, the captain manufactured a gag of cloth and a wooden peg, and inserted it between George's teeth.

"That will stop your yelling, my beauty!" he muttered.
"If you can make your voice heard while that's between your jaws, you're welcome to!"

George's eyes opened. The first object clear to his vision was the savage face of the captain glaring into his. He tried to speak, but the gag choked all utterance.

"Do you understand your position, you cursed spy?" the captain hissed. "You are a dangerous lunatic, and you're going to remain here in irons for the rest of the voyage, because you have developed homicidal tendencies. You have found out our secret; but your knowledge shall go with you to Davy Jones's locker at the first opportunity we get of slinging you overboard!"

And George, brave as he was, felt something very like despair as he realised how utterly he was in the power of this man whose guilt he had discovered!

CHAPTER 5.

A Terrible Imprisonment—Gwynne Takes Action—A Crisis.

The story of George Johnson's sudden insanity excited much concern and comment in the fore-castle, where no one thought of doubting the skipper's assertion.

Gwynne, for the present at least, decided to keep his own counsel. What course he ought to pursue was not quite clear to him.

The foul weather lasted the whole of the next day, and well on into the third, when at length the sea went down somewhat, and the wind dropped.

During all this time neither food nor drink passed the lips of George, who remained in irons in the captain's cabin.

Girdwood contrived to keep Gwynne too busy to think about the prisoner, and it never occurred to the mate that the skipper would be villain enough to starve the helpless man.

During the long, weary hours, what were the thoughts of the unfortunate young sailor?

Painful ones. He knew that the captain had resolved to compass his death if it could be contrived. Hunger gnawed at his vitals, and lack of sustenance made him weak and giddy. But his own sufferings were less in his mind than the horrid remembrance of what he had seen in the Blue Box.

Clarice dead!
The world seemed to be crumbling away around him. He had schooled himself to bear the loss of her, even to think of her as the wife of Barnard Wildair. But that one glimpse of her in the Blue Box told him that all his old feelings were as strong as ever; he loved her as truly and intensely as he had in earlier days.

And she was dead!
The stunning knowledge of that seemed to numb his faculties. It was not till some time had elapsed that it occurred to him that perhaps she was not dead.

There had been no trace of mortification, though she must

have been dead—if she were dead—for weeks. Her looks were those of one in a trance, rather than of a corpse.

A trance! He caught eagerly at the idea. There had been trances, induced by drugs, which were known to last for weeks, even months. And he recollected at once that Barnard Wildair had been a dabbler in chemistry. And then the bells bored in the lid of the box—to admit air, of course; there was no other purpose they could serve. And the regular opening of the Blue Box by the captain during the first dog-watch every day, which he had long ago discovered; it was to ascertain that all was well with the trance-bound captive!

Clarice, then, lived!
Words could not convey the joy that swelled in George's heart when he came to this conclusion.

She lived! And she could be nothing to Barnard Wildair, since it was he who doomed her to this strange captivity.

Perhaps she loved George himself, as he had once dreamed; as she had given him good reason to believe in the old days.

It was an intoxicating thought. And now George longed for liberty, that he might rescue her from the living tomb she lay in—free her from her weird thralldom.

But the fetters, well riveted, defied his mightiest efforts. The gag, bound in its place, choked his fiercest cries. And the Chinaman was ever at hand, on the watch. And soon George's strength began to desert him, as the natural consequence of mental torture, want of motion, and famine.

In the afternoon watch of the third day the Atlantic, smiling under the sunshine so long absent, and most of the traces of the storm gone, Mr. Gwynne was at liberty to think of the alleged lunatic.

At the first opportunity he approached the captain upon the subject.

"May I ask, sir, what is to be done with Johnson?" he said.
"I shall keep him in irons till we drop anchor in the River Plate," curtly replied the captain.

Gwynne looked hard at him.
"That will be several days more," he said, slowly.

"What of it?"
"Have you considered what the result may be upon his health?"

"I have considered everything, and I do not require you to teach me my business. You may go."

"One word more, May I see Johnson?"
"Why do you wish to see him?"

"To assure myself that he is, as is alleged, a lunatic!"
"You cannot take my word for it, eh?"

"You may be mistaken, sir."
The captain gave him a furious look.

"Mr. Gwynne, I command this ship, and I allow no meddling in my affairs. Say no more!"

Much perturbed, the Irish mate turned away.
He did not know what to do.

During the thirty-six hours of George's captivity there had been no sound made by the young sailor. If he were really insane, he would surely utter some cry. If sane, would he not call out some appeal to Gwynne, who had passed and re-passed the cabin-door many times? The mate easily came to the conclusion that he was gagged to prevent any betrayal of the mysterious discovery he had made in the cabin. Was he, then, fed? Could it be the object of the captain to bring about the death of the unfortunate youth?

After much cogitation, Gwynne decided that, permission or no permission, it was his duty to see the prisoner. If Captain Girdwood was cruelly treating the young man, something must be done to stop it.

As soon as he could find an excuse to go below, Patrick Gwynne boldly opened the captain's door.

The burly form of Mat Sing instantly barred his entrance.
"No come in," said the Chinaman.

"Stand aside!" fiercely replied Gwynne; and he gave the ruffian a shove that sent him reeling.

Before Mat Sing could recover himself, the mate strode in.

George had been dumped in a corner, and a rope round his waist was tied to a staple in the bulkhead. A screen had been placed to hide him from the view of any intruder into the cabin.

At the sound of Gwynne's voice he knew that help had come at last, and, as he could not speak, he made a clamorous rattling with his manacles to draw the mate's attention.

Gwynne knocked the screen over, and an exclamation of indignant anger broke from him as he saw George, fettered, pale, emaciated, his lips swollen by the cruel gag.

But before he could act the Chinaman was upon him. Gwynne read murder in the narrow, glittering eyes. Facing the Chinaman, he dealt him a knock-down blow, loosening half his teeth, and sending him flying across the cabin.

Then, bending over George, he tore away the gag. George tried to speak, but his tongue was numb, and his mouth swollen, and he could only gasp inarticulately.

"Curse you, Gwynnet! What are you doing here?"
It was the captain's voice.

PIRATE ISLAND, our next Complete Novel, will be a Startling Tale of Adventure in the Far East.



George leaped up as if worked by a spring. The Chinaman, taken utterly by surprise, started back, and before he could recover, a British fist crashed into his face. The blow, into which George threw all his strength, all his hatred, would have felled an ox. Mat Sing toppled over the gunwale and splashed into the water.

"Don't trouble yourself. I know my business, Mr. Gwynne."

A light broke upon the Irish mate.

"Ah, you are purposely passing the port!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no; but I am managing my own business my own way, with many thanks to you, Mr. Gwynne."

Gwynne reddening with anger at the undeserved snub, retired, and the captain chuckled. He was still chuckling when the chief mate came up, and inquired the cause.

"Gwynne has found that we've passed the River Plate, and he was beginning to give me instructions, when I shut him up," Girdwood explained. "I'll teach him not to shove his oar into my business."

But Danford looked thoughtful.

"I wonder if he sees any connection between this discovery of his and the secret of the cabin?" he said slowly.

"Well, if he does, he is powerless; he can do nothing."

Making a good speed before a southerly wind, the "Berenice" kept on, with the sierra summits of Buenos Ayres in view upon her starboard side.

In the meantime, how fared George in the prison to which his forbidden knowledge consigned him?

He was not so restless as might be supposed. For his long suffering in irons had to some extent weakened him, and he was too knocked up to plan or think. But in time the cramping stiffness left his limbs, his swollen mouth resumed its normal shape, and, with a proper allowance of food, his strength came back.

With returning vigour returned mental torture. When his limbs were strong and his brain was clear, Clarice occupied all his thoughts.

But it was not until after the "Berenice" passed the mouth of the Rio de la Plata that he was able to make an attempt to leave his prison. If once he could get among his messmates, he knew he could rouse them to the rescue of the imprisoned

girl. What fate was intended for her he could not guess, but he knew evil must befall to awaken the sympathy of British sailors. But how was he to get to his mates of the fo'c'sle? There was the difficulty.

Mat Sing hardly left the cabin for a moment. His evil eyes were ever upon the sailor. He even seemed to sleep with one eye open. Several times at night George had tried the door, finding it locked, and it, suddenly found the Chinaman's eyes wide open, following his movements with sardonic amusement. A bitter hatred for the narrow-eyed Celestial grew up in George's heart. At times he could have killed Mat Sing.

More than once he was on the point of attacking the yellow ruffian, but prudence restrained him. The Chinaman was fully his match physically, and both Girdwood and Danford were ever prepared to come to his assistance. Besides, there was the life-preserver to be reckoned with. Mat Sing was really anxious for an opportunity of using it.

George realised that he could only act by stratagem. And what strategy could outwit the keen, alert Oriental? He watched for a chance in vain. Till one night, to his amazement—the night after the "Berenice" had passed the River Plate—Mat Sing left the cabin, and did not come back.

Shut up as he was, George was sailor enough to know that the "Berenice" was slackening speed.

The porthole had been nailed up, so he could not see outside the cabin, but he knew an anchorage of some kind was being approached.

Was it Buenos Ayres? Surely not. The still silence round the ship showed that she was not on the River Plate. Where was she, then?

He heard the rapid motions of the seamen above; he heard the anchor let go; he heard the shaking of spars.

The "Berenice" was anchored, but where?

Where? Not in port. Why then was she anchored? Why, if not to land the mysterious casket she had brought from the Thames?

The thought rushed upon George's mind with all the force of absolute certainty. That was why Mat Sing was gone from the cabin. The Blue Box was to be landed upon this unknown corner of the South American continent. And Clarice? What was to be

her fate? What did Barnard Wildair mean?

The young man paced the cabin with hurried steps, a prey to violent emotion. He must leave the cabin. He must prevent the landing of the entranced girl!

He seized the handle of the door and tugged with fierce strength. It flew open so suddenly that it hit him in the face, and he reeled to the floor. Mat Sing had forgotten to lock the door. But had he forgotten, though? Perhaps it was a trap. George suspected that something was amiss, but he did not hesitate to leave the cabin.

The caddy was dark. Lights, though, were in the captain's cabin, as George could see.

He stepped towards the companion. He took only one step. For then he felt a crashing concussion upon his head, and down he went like a felled tree.

CHAPTER 7.

How the Blue Box was Taken from the "Berenice."

On the Argentine coast, beyond Cape San Antonio, Captain Girdwood had found an anchorage for the "Berenice."

In sight of the blue summits of the Sierra Volcan lay the little cove in which the ship let her anchor go.

A small stream, flowing down from the sierra, emptied into the cove, which on the seaward was shadowed by high cliffs, protecting it from the wind and waves; above all, from view.

"This will suit us Al, won't it, Danford?" said Girdwood, when the "Berenice" was at anchor. "Rather close quarters, but we are well sheltered."

"How did you know of the existence of this cove, captain?" Captain Girdwood smiled.

"It was used by gun-runners during the last revolution in Argentine. I was in that line then, and did well out of it. So when Wildair suggested a rendezvous at some out-of-the-way spot, this cove at once occurred to me, as it takes us so very little out of our route."

"You're sure Wylair will be here?"
 "Oh, yes; he was on the regular steamer to Buenos Ayres, and he must have been several days ahead of us."
 "And we get rid of the Blue Box—"

"Tonight, I shall be glad of it."
 "So shall I. The crew must be wondering. But what are we to do with Johnson? Mat Sing will be wanted in the boat with the Blue Box. We can't leave Johnson unguarded. Without the Chinaman, he'll find some means of communicating with the crew. In fact, the fo's'sle is already indignant at not being allowed to see him, and when you and I are gone, I shouldn't wonder if one of them released him."
 "I've settled about him," said Girdwood, with a dark look. "Mat Sing shall silence him with a crack on the head; we will roll him up in a piece of canvas, and take him in the boat."

"But Gwynne—he will suspect."
 "No, he won't; not till it's all over, at any rate," the captain answered, with a significant smile.
 Danford understood. He nodded. Then he said:
 "But Johnson will make an outcry when Mat Sing attacks him. You can't be sure of catching him asleep."
 "The cabin door shall be left unfastened; he will come out, and Mat Sing will be waiting outside with his club."

"Good; that cannot fail!"
 Patrick Gwynne was much exercised in his mind about this unexpected anchoring of the "Berenice" at an unknown cove. It was the talk of the fo's'sle also; the crew were indeed wondering.

Gwynne guessed that the Blue Box was to be landed at last. His curiosity to know what was in the box could hardly be restrained. How he wished to know what George knew. But that was not possible. He determined to keep his eyes open during the night. But in the first watch he began to grow unaccountably sleepy.

"What the dickens is the matter with me?" he muttered, when he found himself lurching drunkenly against the binnacle. "I had my watch below all right. What makes me so confoundedly drowsy now?"

He could not account for it. And soon his brain grew too dazed for him to attempt to do so. He sat down mechanically on the gangway steps, and went right off to sleep.

Mr. Danford, who was also on deck, viewed this strange conduct with an air of amazement.

"Wake up, wake up!" he exclaimed, coming to the Irishman and shaking him by the shoulder. "Shiver my top-sails—why, he's drunk!"

The men around looked astounded. Gwynne, always a model seaman, drunk on duty! Surely not!

"Perhaps he's ill, sir?" boatswain Antrobus suggested.

"Yes, ill of too much whisky!" snapped Danford. "But lend a hand to get him to his bunk. We needn't let Captain Girdwood see him in this condition."

Willing to help to get their favourite officer out of a scrape, the boatswain and some others lifted Gwynne, carried him down to the cabin, and laid him in his bunk.

He was quite insensible, and breathing hard; but Antrobus noted the fact that there was no odour of strong liquor about him.

"If there was any reason to suspicion such a thing, I should reckon he'd been drugged," the old boatswain said, shaking his head.

"But, as there isn't any reason, don't talk such rot!" Mr. Danford said sharply.

Gwynne was left alone in the cabin, and soon afterwards the chief mate joined the captain.

"Gwynne's settled all right," he remarked. "He's as senseless as a log. How did you give it to him?"
 "In his coffee, after the dog-watch."
 "Well, it's worked like a charm. You had better buck up and finish with Johnson now!"
 How easily poor George played into the hands of the conspirators we have seen.

As soon as Mat Sing's treacherous blow had deprived the sailor of his senses, he was carried into the captain's cabin, and hastily examined. He was completely insensible. The gag which Captain Girdwood had used on him once before was placed in his mouth, and tied there. The sight of his white, drawn face woke no pity in the captain's hard heart.

"Bring the canvas, Danford!" he said.
 George was rolled up in it like a roll of cloth, and a rope was knotted round the outside.

"That's all serene," Girdwood remarked, with a smile of malignant satisfaction. "He won't meddle again in a hurry!"

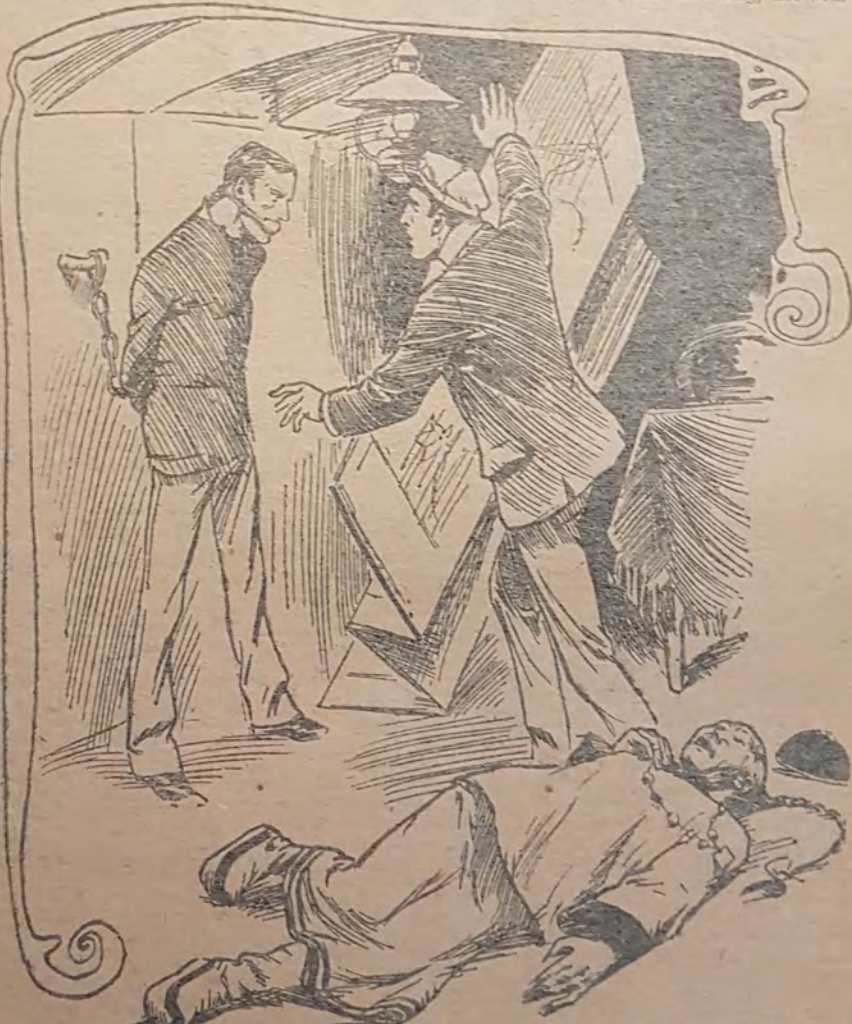
When eight bells told the hour of midnight, Captain Girdwood was in charge of the deck. He had contrived to keep all hands pretty busy during the day, so that the tired crew were glad to hear that no watch was to be set.

Both starboard and port watches sought bunk and hammock, and Captain Girdwood remained alone on the deck.

The night was fine, neither light nor dark. A rather chilly breeze came from the inland sierras.

There were no lights burning on board the "Berenice." Dim and shadowy the great ship looked as she swung to her cable.

In the dead of the night, while the fatigued sailors slept, while the Irish mate lay drug-bound, a boat was noiselessly lowered. Then Girdwood, Danford, and Mat Sing, not with-



At the sound of Gwynne's voice he knew that help had come at last, and, as he could not speak, he made a clamorous rattling with his manacles to draw the mate's attention. Gwynne knocked the screen over, and an exclamation of indignant anger broke from him as he saw George, fettered, pale, emaciated, his lips swollen by the cruel gag.

out difficulty, carried the canvas-wrapped Blue Box up the companion, and along it, by means of a "whip," over the side, and lowered it into the boat. Then Mat Sing brought up what appeared to be a huge roll of canvas; it was the inn-sensible sailor. He was lowered into the boat, Danford receiving him, and shoving him down beside the Blue Box. Over both a large piece of tarpaulin was carelessly flung, concealing them from sight.

"All ready?" Captain Girdwood asked.

"Ay, ay!"

"Then I'll call the boatswain."

It was impossible to leave the ship with her whole crew sleeping, so Captain Girdwood had decided to leave Septimus Antrobus in charge.

He called the boatswain, told him that he and Mr. Danford were going for a pull up the river, and directed him to have all ready for sailing by the first bell in the forenoon watch; that is to say, half-past eight in the morning.

The boatswain was naturally surprised by this nocturnal excursion, but he made no remark.

Captain Girdwood entered the boat, and took the tiller-lines, and Danford and Mat Sing took the oars.

Antrobus watched them with a puzzled expression as the boat pulled over the bar, and passed into the little stream. He had a vague feeling that something was amiss, though he had no suspicion of what was hidden under the carelessly-thrown tarpaulin he saw in the boat.

The oarsmen pulled slowly up the stream. About half a mile from the cove a heavy forest-growth covered both banks of the stream. Long branches, looking like ghostly arms in the gloom, stretched across, in places meeting in the middle, and shutting out the sky.

Had the captain still intended the death of our hero, he could have carried out the fell purpose now with ease.

But Girdwood was too cunning, if not too conscientious, to take a human life if it was not absolutely necessary to his security or his success.

There was another way he had in view of disposing of George without bringing his neck within the shadow of the noose.

"We moor here," he said abruptly, as the boat glided under a gigantic ceiba on the left bank.

Willingly the oarsmen ceased their labour.

The painter was made fast to a sapling, and Captain Girdwood stepped ashore at a spot where a narrow path pierced the chapparal, growing very dense around the big ceiba.

Standing there, he gave a shrill whistle, and repeated it at intervals of a few minutes, until in about a quarter of an hour there came a similar sound in reply.

The captain, who was becoming impatient, uttered an exclamation of satisfaction as he heard it.

A little later a lantern-gleam came from the chapparal, and hurried footsteps approached the water's edge.

"Is that you, Wildair?"

"It is. Are you Captain Girdwood?"

"Ay, ay!"

"And the Blue Box?"

"Here in the boat."

"And the lady?"

"Same as ever."

"She has not succumbed?"

"No."

"Bring the box ashore, then, and place it in the jacal."

And George, in the canvas roll, having come to himself during the pull up the stream, heard the exchange of words.

Clarice was to be landed, then; and Barnard Wildair was here to receive her. His heart burned within him.

CHAPTER 3.

Barnard Wildair's Retreat—George Turns the Tables upon Mat Sing—A Message to the "Beronico."

In the midst of the dark-green chapparal was a clearing, made by human hands, to which the path from the river led.

The clearing had been made, probably, a year or more ago, for everywhere the tropical growths were springing up afresh.

In the open space stood a group of "jacals," or huts made of the materials furnished by the forest. There were eight or nine of them, but most had gone to decay. Two or three had been patched up with new roofs of bark, and the walls mended with faced lianas, to render them fit for habitation.

The largest of the jacals contained many articles of furniture. The Blue Box was placed here, Captain Girdwood looked round the hut with an air of surprise.

"You have improved the old quarters a bit," he remarked.

"How did you get all these things here, Mr. Wildair?"

"I bought a little cutter in Buenos Ayres, furnished for pleasure trips on the coast," explained Wildair. "I've put her out of sight further up the river, and taken out her fittings to make my stay here a bit more comfortable."

"You are not alone here, I suppose?"

"No, I have a couple of half-breeds; two black-muzzled rascals who would cut their father's throat for a few pesos."

"They may be of use to you in that line," the captain said, with a laugh; and he told his employer of the sailor rolled up in canvas in the boat.

Barnard Wildair looked decidedly annoyed. He was a rather pale, studious-looking man, with shifty eyes and a receding chin. No one would have taken him for a man of much courage. The responsibility Captain Girdwood threw upon him made him irritably nervous.

"That is not my business," he exclaimed. "If you are clumsy enough to be discovered by one of your own crew, you must take the consequences. Settle with the man yourself."

"All right; I'll turn him loose in the chapparal."

"And let him escape to Buenos Ayres, and blab out there what he has seen here!" exclaimed Wildair, savagely. "I tell you it's your business. Your Chinaman looks as if he had done plenty of that kind of work. I will add fifty pounds to the sum we agreed upon. You understand? Let me hear to more of this Johnson."

The captain reflected for a few minutes, and then looked at Danford. The chief mate nodded. Girdwood spoke a few words in Chinese to the yellow-skinned ruffian. Mat Sing grinned, his narrow eyes scintillating, and tapped his knife. The white men remained in the jacal while the assassin went rapidly down the dark path to the river. Neither wished to see the work done. Brutes as they were, they could not bear to look on while a helpless man was drowned like a rat.

From the river came abruptly an echoing splash!

They exchanged glances.

It was all over, then. In silence they awaited the return of the Chinaman.

But he did not come.

While the trio of scoundrels were bearing the weighty Blue Box through the chapparal, George was left alone in the boat.

Although his head was aching, the effect of the blow he had received, his brain was active and alert. His wit had never been keener, more collected. For he realised that the final crisis had come. Clarice Derwent was delivered into the hands of Barnard Wildair in the South American wilderness. Now or never was the time for action.

Whether his own death was planned he did not know; but he was perfectly sure that if Barnard Wildair discovered his identity, his life would not be worth a moment's purchase.

The moment his senses told him that he was alone in the boat he began to struggle for liberty.

His limbs were not tied, fortunately; that had not been considered necessary, as he was insensible when rolled up in the canvas, and seemed likely to remain so for some time. A rope had been knotted round the roll on the outside, but this could not long imprison a man wrestling for life and all that life held dear to him. Squeezing, wriggling, wrenching, the active sailor worked his way out of the open end of the roll, and gradually emerged. As soon as his arms were out, all was simple. He tore away the gag from his mouth, and drew in a long draught of the cool night air.

He had just released his feet from the canvas when he heard the footsteps of Mat Sing in the chapparal.

A hunted look came into his eyes; desperation into his heart. He would not be recaptured alive! But there was no escape. He could not leave the boat unseen by the man on the shore. There was but one coming; he knew by the steps. Quick as thought—acting by instinct, not by reason—he slid under the tarpaulin, and lay concealed, his fists clenched, his heart beating.

The Chinaman stepped into the boat, stooped, and jerked aside the tarpaulin. He expected to see the roll under it containing George. The roll was there, but he had no time to see it. For George leaped up as if worked by a spring. The Chinaman, taken utterly by surprise, started back, and before he could recover, a British fist crashed into his face. The blow, into which George threw all his strength, all his hatred, would have felled an ox. Mat Sing toppled over the gunwale, and splashed into the water.

That was the splash heard by the listening villains in the jacal.

George, standing erect in the rocking boat, watched the widening circles where the Chinaman had sunk. He had seen that Mat Sing came to the boat to kill him. He knew that either he or his assailant must perish. If the Chinaman came up alive, George would have to dash his brains out with an oar. He shuddered at the thought, but he knew he must do it.

Mat Sing came up. He was not struggling. His deathly face showed above the water for an instant, and then it disappeared again. George breathed a sigh of relief. His work was done. That one terrific right-hander had stumped the assassin. The current bore him seaward, either dead already or surely drowning.

George had no time for sentimental regrets; dangers were too thick around him still.

For a minute or two he pressed his hands to his temples, and thought hard.

The safest thing to do was to slip down the stream in the boat to the "Berenice," and rouse his shipmates to his aid. But in the meantime, whither might Clarice be taken? And could he again find this place, which had little or nothing to distinguish it from the chapparal along the river?

An idea came to him, which he at once acted upon. Something out of the canvas which he had been wrapped in, he dipped his hand into the thick black mud which rimmed the stream, and roughly daubed these words: "Help. George Johnson."

It took him but a minute; then, stepping ashore, he untied the painter, turned the boat's bow outward, and, with a vigorous shove, sent her into the middle of the stream.

There the strong current caught her, and sped her rapidly seaward, the way the drowned Chinaman had gone.

That this strangely-sent message would meet some eye on board the "Berenice," and bring his shipmates up the river, George fervently hoped.

Leaving the waterside, he entered the chapparal, which was dense enough to hide him from any pursuit but a blood-hound's.

The continued absence of the Chinaman surprised Captain Girdwood and his companions.

"Why doesn't he come back?" muttered the skipper, as minute followed minute of deadly silence.

"Nothing can have happened?" suggested Danford.

"How could it? Johnson was utterly helpless."

"Yet it is strange."

"Go and ascertain, for heaven's sake!" exclaimed Barnard Wildair nervously.

"Come," said Girdwood laconically.

The two officers strode down the jungle path to the river. Several minutes had elapsed since George sent the boat adrift. When they saw its place empty, the two men looked at each other in extreme disquietude.

"Surely Mat Sing would not be fool enough to return without us!" muttered Girdwood.

"Can Johnson have contrived to turn the tables upon him? If so, he has gone back to the 'Berenice' in the boat."

"Where could Mat Sing be, then?"

Danford pointed to the dark water.

"By heaven, if it be so, Johnson's life shall pay for his!" violently exclaimed the captain. "But it can't be. I'd rather believe that Mat Sing has gone back to the ship for some reason."

"In any case, the sooner we get to the 'Berenice,' the better."

The captain swore a bitter oath.

"We shall have to walk. Wildair has no craft except his cutter, which is moored up the river, as far from us as the 'Berenice' is. Come, there's not a moment to be lost!"

"But won't you tell Wildair first?"

"What's the use? We must not lose an instant. Every second increases Johnson's chance of raising a mutiny before we can put the stopper on him, if he has really escaped Mat Sing and gone to the 'Berenice.'"

Breathing vengeance upon the man who had caused them all this anxiety and alarm, the two started seaward, forcing their way through the tangled growths of the chapparal, sometimes wading in the stream's margin to avoid the obstruction. But it was a slow and weary journey, and the sun was high in the heavens before they came in sight of the cove.

CHAPTER 9.

The Story of Wildair's Villainy—A Startling Apparition

"Where am I? Oh, where am I?"

It was a weak and feeble voice that spoke.

Sunlight gleamed through the branches, and fell in golden patches upon the clearing in the chapparal.

In the furnished jacal a girl's graceful form was extended upon a couch.

The Blue Box lay open, containing nothing now but the pillows and padding which had filled the space around the form of Clarice Derwent.

The girl, into whose waxen cheeks a faint flush of colour had come, was conscious. The narcotic's reign was over.

Her large, dark eyes wandered around the jacal with an expression of intense fear and bewilderment.

"Don't be afraid, Clarice," said Barnard Wildair, stepping to her side. "You are perfectly safe under my care."

Her glance, as it turned upon him, expressed dread and dislike.

"Where am I?" she repeated. "This—this is not Harley Hall."

Wildair laughed.

"You are many a hundred miles from England, Clarice," answered he. "You cannot guess where! What do you say to South America?"

"South America!" she gasped.

"Don't talk now; you are not strong enough," said Wildair, narrowly watching her face.

Clarice made an imperious gesture.

"I command you to tell me all, Barnard Wildair. I have fallen into some horrible trap. You have somehow made me the victim of your cunning. Tell me where I am, and how I came here?"

"As you will. You have suffered much less than I anticipated. What do you remember last?"

"I remember—ah!" she exclaimed abruptly, "you dragged me with that cup of coffee!"

"Exactly. Do you recollect any subsequent events?"

"I have a confused remembrance. It seems like a dream. Did I dream that I was enclosed in a coffin?" she exclaimed with a shudder.

"You did not dream it. You can call to mind the Blue Box, a familiar object at Harley Hall? There it lies. In that you have made the passage of the Atlantic."

She looked bewildered, as well she might. Wildair, who evidently felt an intense pride in what he had accomplished, continued:

"Do you remember my laboratory at Harley Hall, and my experiments? Well, I obtained there the knowledge which has since proved so useful to me. From my early boyhood was my plan fixed—to become master of Harley Hall and the Massingford fortune. To this end, I contrived the quarrel between Sir Bertram and my cousin George; to this end, I resolved to marry you."

A man who was crouching under a bush close to the plaited liana wall of the jacal, ground his teeth silently.

The interstices of the flimsy wall enabled this unsuspected spy both to see and to hear.

"George played into my hands by running away to sea," Wildair continued. "You gave me more trouble. You were fool enough to fall in love with George instead of me, and you refused to change your mind; though I convinced George that you had done so." And he gave a gloomish chuckle.

"What do you mean?" faltered the girl. "Is George's long silence, which has caused me such pain, due to you?"

"Entirely. I do not believe in half-measures. A love-letter addressed to me, in what appeared to be your writing, came into George's hands by a carefully-contrived accident," laughed Wildair.

Again the unseen watcher ground his teeth.

"Fool, fool that I was!" he murmured inaudibly.

"Gracious Heaven, what horrible treachery!" Clarice cried, aghast at this revelation of her cousin's duplicity.

Wildair laughed lightly.

"To continue," he said, "when Sir Bertram died, I was disappointed to find that he had relented towards George; that half his money was to accompany the title, if ever the lost lamb turned up again. If ever he does turn up, he will not long survive it, if I can contrive matters to my satisfaction. But I have great hopes that he is already dead."

The man outside the leafy wall smiled a grim smile.

"This disposal of my uncle's money made me all the more determined to obtain all the other half, which was divided between you and me. But you had the bad taste to obstinately decline the honour of becoming my wife. I saw also that you would oppose any steps I took to prove the demise of our missing cousin. I decided that you must become Mrs. Wildair, whether you liked it or not."

"That I will never do."

Wildair waved his hand airily.

"We shall see, Clarice. You left Harley Hall after Sir Bertram's death. When my plans were ripe, I made you revisit the place. You were drugged into unconsciousness, placed in the Blue Box, and carried aboard a vessel in the Thames in the dead of night. They have landed you in South America. Here we are alone in a hut in the forest—alone, that is, save for two Buenos Ayres bravos in my employ. Will you dare repeat your refusal? You dare not. Everybody at home will say it is an elopement. You are in my power. You must become my wife."

Clarice trembled. This was an aspect of the case her mind had not yet grasped.

"You could tell your story," resumed Wildair, with a look of malicious triumph, "but who would believe it! The story of a trance which lasted for weeks, of your being carried to another hemisphere in a ship you do not even know the name of. It would sound too extraordinary to be credited."

Clarice cast a wild glance around.

"But is it true? You are deceiving me," she exclaimed.

"I will not believe that I could be carried across an ocean without being aware of it."

"I do not wonder that you are astonished. It is not every

PIRATE ISLAND, our next Complete Novel, will unfold a Startling Story of Adventure in the Far East.

"One who can do what I have done," Wildair replied, with an arrogant smile. "Even I am surprised at my complete success. I owe much to the intelligent co-operation of the captain of the—never mind what ship. He has carried out my directions faithfully. The narcotic to which you were subjected needed to be renewed at intervals. At the same time, your strength had to be preserved, this being done by certain injections, which"—he laughed—"I learned all about from a certain professor, who astonished London by a fast of fifty days' duration. Your fast was of only half, or a little over half, that length. I admit that there was danger of your succumbing; but in that case I should have been consoled, for, after all, I am your heir."

Clarice looked at him in horror.

"Are you a fiend?" she breathed.

"No, only a very ordinary man; but terribly in want of wealth," he smiled. "When I marry you, I shall be richer by twenty thousand pounds."

"Never, never!"

He made a gesture of disdain, which showed how little he believed in her resolution.

"You must go home as my wife, or not at all."

"Then I will not go at all."

"Ah, you will soon grow tired of South America!"

Clarice sank back upon the couch. She was still very weak. Wildair's devices, carried out carefully by Captain Girdwood, had sustained her during her long trance; but when restored to consciousness, she was in a very feeble state.

"Is there no one to save me?" she moaned.

"No one," Wildair assured her. "Submit to the inevitable; that is your wisest course."

"Oh, you coward! If George were only here!"

"But George is not here. George is probably in his grave," sneered Wildair. "George, the beloved George, can never come between you and me!"

Clarice's pale cheeks were wet with tears.

"Heaven help me!" she murmured, in anguish.

The man listening by the jacob wall could endure no more. Flinging prudence to the winds, he sprang up, and, bursting through the flimsy barrier, leaped into the hut, crying:

"Liar! Coward! George is here!"

Clarice saw him, and cried out with joy.

And Wildair, white as death, recoiled before the man he had wronged, the very last man he had expected to see at that moment and in that place.

CHAPTER 10.

Gwynne Speaks Out—The Crew of the "Berenice" Take the Law into Their Own Hands.

Boatswain Antrobus was leaning on the taffrail of the "Berenice," gazing idly landward, as the sun rose on that eventful morning.

The strengthening light showed him that some object, drifting down the stream, had stranded upon the sandy bar at its mouth.

There it lay, rocking to the motion of the water, unable to pass the bar. At first the boatswain gave it little attention, for he imagined it to be a fallen tree which had been borne down to the cove by the current. But when the sunlight became clearer, he discovered it to be a boat, and the very boat in which Captain Girdwood had left the "Berenice."

Alarmed to see it return empty, from which it seemed clear enough that some terrible accident had happened, the boatswain ran down to wake Mr. Gwynne.

The effects of the drug had by this time partly worn off, and the second mate was in a healthy sleep, from which the boatswain's vigorous shakes at last aroused him.

Still a little dazed, it took Gwynne some time to collect his senses; but at length he understood that the captain had gone up the river the preceding night, or rather, early that morning, and that the boat had drifted back empty.

"Somethin's happened, sartin," the old boatswain averred.

"Bring the boat alongside. I'll be up in a jiffy."

And by the time Gwynne was on deck, the crew were roused and had tumbled up, and Antrobus had towed in the empty boat.

"Look yar, sir," the boatswain said, in an awed voice, and every eye aboard the "Berenice" read the strange message of our hero, traced with black mud upon grey canvas.

"Help! George Johnson!" repeated Gwynne, bewildered.

"Isn't the man in the cabin?"

"He can't be, sir."

"Ascertain at once, Maxwell."

Maxwell hurried down, and returned in a moment to report that the cabin door was unlocked, and the cabin empty.

"There's some black work here, I'm greatly afraid," Antrobus said, shaking his head.

"It seems clear," said Gwynne, "that Johnson was taken up the river last night in the boat. Who saw it go?"

No one had, as was soon ascertained. The suspicion of

foul play deepened in Gwynne's mind. Stepping down the companion, he examined the captain's cabin for the Blue Box George had described to him. Of course he did not find it. He thought he saw all clear now. The Blue Box had been landed, and George had been got rid of to still his tongue. Indignation mastered Gwynne; he returned to the deck in a white heat.

"Men," he said, in a quivering voice, "there has been foul play here!"

"Towards Johnson, sir?" the boatswain asked.

"Ay. Listen. The captain brought from Gravesend an article which he kept hidden in his cabin. This—I need not explain how—was known to Johnson. He had certain suspicions about it, to verify which he visited the skipper's cabin. He discovered the secret—some dark secret, I greatly fear—became insane, and so he was kept a prisoner. But for my interference, Captain Girdwood would have starved him to death."

There was a murmur from the crew.

"Last night," Gwynne resumed with increasing vehemence,

"last night he was taken away unknown to us, along with the Blue Box the captain brought from the Thames. I had warned Captain Girdwood that I would permit no foul play towards Johnson. I am convinced that I was drugged last night to prevent my interference with his scoundrelly proceedings."

"Sure of it, I am," exclaimed Antrobus emphatically.

"Mr. Danford said you was drunk, but I said, if there was any reason to suppose you was drugged, that'd be my idea. And here's a reason, by Jupiter, a reason as big as a whale."

"But their schemes have gone awry somehow," continued Gwynne. "Johnson must have been free when he sent us this strange message. Messmates, it's risky business opposing a skipper, but I reckon none of us will be afraid to stand by Johnson at this moment."

The seamen gave a cheer, and Gwynne saw that he could depend upon them.

"Then down with the longboat, and we will put a spoke in their wheel, the spalpeens!" Gwynne exclaimed.

The seamen obeyed heartily; the longboat was manned, and Gwynne directed the men to take bludgeons in case there should be any hostile encounter. Sixteen men entered the boat with Gwynne and Antrobus, and the mast was stepped. A breeze blew from the sea, which carried the longboat quickly over the bar.

"Jerusalem!" ejaculated Antrobus suddenly, "look there!"

Every eye followed the direction of his finger. In the bar the branches of a floating tree were embedded, the trunk swaying to the stream. Amid the roots the boatswain had caught a glimpse of a deathly face. A man caught upon a prong-like root by his clothing, hung there, only his head above the water, and that every now and then dipping under.

"Good heavens!"

"Is it Johnson?"

"No."

"It's Mat Sing!"

The Chinaman it was, as they saw on approaching the body. The boatswain hooked it higher with a boathook. The features were swollen and discoloured by a smashing blow, but death had evidently been due to drowning.

"There's been a fight, then," Antrobus said, in a low voice, as he released the ghastly object.

"Forward!" Gwynne said quietly.

Leaving the dead Chinaman where he was, the boat moved on.

"Ho, there!"

It was a hail from the river bank.

Captain Girdwood and the chief mate had, after a tiresome journey, come in sight of the cove. Glad were they to see the tall masts and graceful spars of the "Berenice." But their pleasure changed to apprehension when they saw the longboat's topsail and mainsail filled by the breeze.

"Johnson has raised a mutiny, then," Danford said, with a sickening fear at his heart.

Captain Girdwood sharply scanned the boat.

"No, Johnson is not there," he said.

"What can it all mean, then?"

"That we shall soon see."

Captain Girdwood hailed the boat. It was steered inshore to the spot where the officers stood, and they jumped aboard.

Girdwood bent a stern glance upon Patrick Gwynne.

"Mr. Gwynne, please explain why you have left the 'Berenice' without orders," he said.

"Certainly. We—the crew of the 'Berenice'—learned that one of our shipmates was in danger. We are going to the rescue," the Irish mate answered calmly.

"Captain Girdwood, where is George Johnson?"

"What do you mean?"

"Where is George Johnson?"

Gwynne's menacing tone, and the dark looks of the boat's crew made the skipper uneasy. But for the miscarriage of

his place caused by the escape of George and the loss of the boat. He would have been back in the "Berenice" soon after dark. Settling sail immediately, the absence of George would have been discovered till they were out at sea. Then the men would have been that, his door being thoughtlessly left unlocked, the "lunatic" had escaped ashore while the ship was in the cove. If Gwynne had made trouble, a threat of arrest for drunkenness on duty would have silenced him.

But now everything had gone wrong. How much Gwynne knew, Captain Girdwood could not tell. But it was clear that the men had determined to find out what had become of their lost shipmate, Gentleman George.

"Where is George Johnson?" sternly asked a dozen voices. "How should I know?" stammered the skipper. "Isn't he in the cabin on the 'Berenice'?"

"Don't you take him up the river with you?"

"No," Girdwood said boldly.

"Then how is it that your boat came back with a message from him?"

"A message from him?"

"And who struck your Chinaman, whose dead body lies in the roots of yonder tree stuck on the bar?"

"Mat Sing dead!" gasped the captain.

"Do you now deny that you took Johnson away from the ship while the crew were asleep, and I was drugged?" cried Gwynne, with flashing eyes. "Do you deny that you have murdered our shipmate yonder in the forest?"

A fierce growl came from the seamen. "Seize the murderer!"

"Check him into the river!"

"Down with him!"

"Stand back!" shouted the captain, drawing a revolver as the seamen advanced.

Gwynne snatched it away from his unnerved hand. "Down with the murderer!" rose the cry.

"Captain Girdwood, if you love your life, lead us to where you left Johnson, alive or dead."

"Do you dare to threaten me?" exclaimed the captain, with a last attempt at bluster.

"No more words!" fiercely answered the mate. "Lead us, or as there's a Heaven above, you shall drown like a rat this minute."

The Irishman, with his blood up, was reckless of consequences. He meant every word he said, and the grim faces around showed that he only voiced the sentiments of the whole party. And, with dark Death hovering over him, it was no wonder that the captain yielded.

"I admit," he almost stammered in his fear, "that Johnson was in the boat with us. We went ashore, leaving Johnson and Mat Sing alone."

"Johnson was a prisoner?"

"No—er—er—yes."

"And Mat Sing was told to finish him, I suppose?"

"No, no. I meant to maroon Johnson, as he was too troublesome to be left aboard the 'Berenice.' But he must have mastered the Chinaman—killed him, it appears—and sent the boat adrift. If he did not return in the boat, he must have landed of his own accord. I swear I do not know more."

Gwynne looked thoughtful.

"You seem to be speaking the truth," he said slowly.

"But the story is very fishy. However, we'll investigate before we proceed to extremities. Take us to the place where you left the boat with Johnson and Mat Sing in it. If Johnson went ashore, we shall find some traces. No trickery now; your life is at stake."

The captain looked helplessly at Danford. Both saw looming ahead an exposure of the whole affair of the Blue Box. But they were powerless to resist. Life was dearer than anything else, and life now depended upon finding Johnson. Sullenly Girdwood assented, and sat down scowling upon a thwart.

The longboat flew on very quickly, reaching the huge ceiba under which Girdwood had stopped to land the Blue Box.

"This is the place," surlily growled the skipper.

The sail was lowered; the boat moored. Gwynne's keen eyes surveyed the bank.

"Here is a path between the thickets," he exclaimed.

"Now, first of all, hail; if Johnson's within hearing he'll know his shipmates are here then."

A mighty shout burst from the seamen. Far through the dense chapparal it echoed. Then in silence they listened for a reply. It came, in Johnson's voice.

"Help!"

"Follow me!" cried Gwynne, and scrambling ashore, the Irish mate led the men of the "Berenice" to the rescue.

CHAPTER II.

Face to Face—A Fight for Life—At the Last Moment.

When George sprang so abruptly into the jaca! and confronted Barnard Wildair, the schemer was utterly astounded by the apparition.

He never connected George in his mind with the "Johnson." Captain Girdwood had alluded to as a prisoner in the boat. The departure of Girdwood and Danford without a word of explanation had indeed surprised him, but he did not dream of attributing it to its true cause.

George had not intended to reveal himself.

When he first reached the jaca!, he saw that Barnard Wildair had two armed companions; and, hoping that his message would bring help from the "Berenice," he took cover in the bush close to the wall of Wildair's hut, to keep watch. Unarmed and alone, he wished to postpone a conflict until help, if it were coming, could reach him.

But the appeal of Clarice was too much for his prudence, and besides, every word of Wildair's lashed him to rage. He broke into the jaca! with the intention of taking summary vengeance upon the kidnapper.

"Scoundrel!" he said, advancing as Wildair recoiled, "I am here, and to me you shall answer for your villainy."

And his fist crashed into the pale face of the schemer, whose courage all ebbed away when he found himself confronted by a strong man instead of a weak woman.

Wildair fell, and did not attempt to rise.

"Coward!" panted George. "Get up; be a man for once in your life!"

"Curse you!" muttered Wildair, grinding his teeth, "your life shall pay for this!"

With a sudden bound, he eluded the grasp of the sailor, and escaped from the jaca! before George could seize him.

"Pedro! Mondego!" he cried.

The two Buenos Ayres bravos were already advancing to ascertain the cause of the fracas.

Wildair pointed to the jaca!.

"My worst enemy is there," he cried, with blazing eyes. "A hundred golden onzas for his death!"

Drawing their poniards, the half-breeds rushed into the jaca!, Wildair following.

George realised how imprudent he had been, but it was too late now for retreat.

Glaring round in search of a weapon, he seized the heavy chain and padlock which had fastened the Blue Box, and which had been thrown aside when Wildair opened it.

Swinging it aloft in a bunch, he stood prepared to strike, and so fearless and resolute did he look, that his foes for a minute hesitated to come to close quarters.

The horror of the scene, the impending destruction of the man she loved, overcame the already exhausted Clarice. She gave a low moan of anguish and swooned away.

"Cowards!" George cried, fear lost in fury. "Come on, all of you. Cowards!"

Wildair laughed like an exulting demon.

"Your hour has come, George Massingford," he said. "What good wind blew you here into my power? This is a stroke of fortune I never dreamed of. At this moment all my plans come to complete success. Attack him, my brave fellows. A hundred golden onzas for his life!"

The two dusky ruffians rushed at the Englishman.

They sought to elude his blow, but George was quick and sure-handed; the heavy chain and padlock crashed upon the head of Mondego, stretching him senseless upon the ground.

The poniard of Pedro was actually touching George's breast when he grasped the swarthy wrist, and, stopping the blow, closed with the villain and struggled.

"Kill him!" hissed Wildair.

He darted behind George and gripped him. At that moment the shout of Gwynne and the sailors rang through the chapparal.

"Help!" yelled George, nearly delirious with joy to hear the welcome voices of his shipmates.

The next moment he was down. He and his foes heard the advancing footsteps of the seamen. But Wildair, coward as he was, had too much at stake to fly then. At least he would kill his hated rival first. George was down; but the half-breed could not free his knife hand.

The poniard of Mondego lay upon the ground. Wildair grasped it; one blow, and then fight, that was the thought which burned in his brain.

The shining blade gleamed before George's eyes as it was fung up for the death-stroke.

It was descending—ah!

Crack!

A shower of warm blood splashed over George's face. He felt himself suddenly freed. Half-blinded, he staggered to his feet. Dashing the red mist from his eyes with one hand, he glanced round the jaca!.

Gwynne stood at the door, revolver in hand. Pedro was in the grip of Septimus Antrobus. Barnard Wildair lay writhing upon the ground in mortal agony.

"Just in time," said Gwynne coolly. "I potted the spalpeen just in time to save your life, my boy."

And even as he spoke, the soul of Barnard Wildair fled from his quivering body.

We have a little more to tell. Barnard Wildair was buried in the chapparel, the Blue Box being his coffin. His two rascally assistants were well "larruped" by the boatwain, and then allowed to flee. Clarice was carried with all tenderness to the "Berenice" in the longboat with the returning seamen.

Captain Girdwood and Danford were allowed to sail in the "Berenice," but Gwynne retained command. At Buenos Ayres the two scoundrels were formally charged and given up to the police, to await extradition and a trial for kidnapping. Gwynne telegraphed to the owners in London for instructions, and was ordered to provisional command and bring the ship back to the Thames.

Girdwood and Danford, by means of a bribe, escaped from prison. But they were not unpunished, for they lost their rank and employment, and never touched the reward they had expected from Barnard Wildair.

By the time the "Berenice" dropped anchor in the Thames,

Clarice had completely recovered from the effects of her long and weird captivity.

The death of Sir Bertram had left the title to our hero, and the men of the "Berenice" were extremely proud to find that the innominate they had named "Gentleman George" had turned out to be a "real live baronet." They were never tired of addressing him as "Sir George."

All misunderstandings between George and Clarice were, of course, at an end, and as soon as possible after the arrival in England, their wedding took place. Gwynne, to whom both gratefully attributed their escape from so many dangers, was best-man, and Sir George was careful to provide a royal "jollification" for the whole of the brave crew of his old ship.

And in the happiness of her new life, Clarice is learning to forget her terrible imprisonment in the Blue Box of the "Berenice."

THE END.



How to Become Rich. The size of type in which I announced this paragraph in last week's Chat leaves no doubt in my mind that you are all looking forward to my disclosures.

To commence with, I should like to say that no riches can ever be obtained without a great deal of hard work. That is the groundwork upon which I shall base my remarks upon the subject this week.

Now, no one will deny that, in order to work well in whatever sphere one's lot is cast, good health is necessary. Therefore, your prime object will be to take care of your health. And that brings me to the chief point of my speech.

Health comes before everything. The man with genius who lets his bodily health run down soon loses his brilliancy, and, later, his reputation.

Very few people are unhealthy to start with—bad health is an acquirement, sometimes through accident, sometimes negligence. And, in the majority of cases, as regards boys and youths, through smoking the deadly cigarette.

Cigarettes, be they the finest made, must necessarily be highly injurious to the health of the smoker, as I have before pointed out. That being so, the man who has undermined his health in his youth through being a slave to the pernicious habit, must necessarily fall behind in the battle of life; and, what is worse still, must fill an early grave.

Leave the cigarette alone, then, my young friends. Leave it to those who are older, and whom it is less powerful to harm. If you do so, then your health will stay by you, your brain will work easier and be clearer, you will live to an old age, and consequently be happy.

The fact that you have your health and the full use of your brain will put you a step above those who are foolish enough to neglect this advice, and, once you get your foot well upon the ladder, you will find the ascent comparatively easy.

The natural consequence will be that, in your high position, your income will increase.

Surely such a prospect as this is worth more than the fleeting pleasure which can be given by all the cigarettes in the world.

Try it, and in after years, when you have followed my advice, I prophesy you will have reason to thank your Editor for having put you on the path to health, wealth, and happiness.

"Pirate Island." Next week I shall give you a treat in the form of a thrilling, complete novel, entitled "Pirate Island," written by one of your favourite authors.

The story will deal with the startling and strange adventures of Hal Merritt on an unknown island in the Eastern seas. When I tell you that it held my interest from the first line to the last, you will be able to form some opinion of its nature, for a story has to be very good indeed to enthrall me.

The yarn tells how the secretary of Mander and Co., ship-owners, has mysteriously disappeared, and is suspected of forgery. This missing secretary has a friend in Hal Merritt, and it is owing to Hal's zeal in his friend's cause that he gets into serious trouble. How certain villains plot to steal ships and murder their crews, and how Hal and his friend act against

them, is told in a masterly way which cannot fail to interest. The author of the story takes the characters to an unknown island near Formosa, where—

But there! If I go on I shall be saying too much. Anyway, I may remark that the adventures which take place in Formosa—that wonderful and little-known island off the coast of China, where tribes of cannibals still prowl—will simply startle you.

Take my advice, and don't miss "Pirate Island," which I assure you is a story among stories. Next Friday it will be ready for you.

The Value of Intelligence. I am afraid that, at the risk of being impolite, Horace K., I shall have to tell you that I consider you a conceited youth. Your letter brings to my mind an old joke, which will answer you better than I could, while in itself it is well worth reading:

Robinson: "That's a fine dog you have, Dumley. Do you want to sell him?"

Dumley: "I'll sell him for ten pounds."

Robinson: "Is he intelligent?"

Dumley (with emphasis): "Intelligent? Why, that dog knows as much as I do."

Robinson: "You don't say so! Well, I'll give you twopence for him, Dumley."

Acting the Old Man. In order to more completely answer your query, Dick S., as to how to make up as an old man, for private theatricals, I have interviewed a prominent actor. Here is what he says:

I am between twenty and thirty, and considered young-looking for my age. Often I have to take old men's parts, and this is how my dresser goes to work:

First he lays on the flesh tint in grease paint, and then he touches me up here and there with rouge. Rouge is always necessary, for the simple reason that the glaring lights make even a rosy face look almost deathly pale. If I am personating a very old man, there is very little rouge put on.

Then comes the manufacture of the wrinkles. There are several methods of producing these.

The plan I adopt is to take a stick of blue colour, and lightly draw it across those portions of the forehead and cheeks where wrinkles usually come. The lines thus produced have to be carefully executed, and are afterwards sharpened up with white, or toned down so as to prevent them giving the face a "gridiron" appearance.

The bright red of the lips is then hidden in a faint coat of blue, and a tooth or two is stopped out by covering it with black soft gutta-percha preparation. The effect of this last operation is quite astonishing, for even when examined at close quarters one would not believe that the actor is not really toothless.

When the face is finished on goes my wig, and if this is a bald one, the join where it meets the skin has to be obliterated very carefully.

The paint is removed by smearing the face with cold-cream or vaseline, wiping it off with a sponge, and then undergoing a thorough washing with hot water. It comes off most skins readily.

Worth Reading. Here is a joke sent me by a reader who has lately been married, which I think is worth repeating to you:

Husband (eating breakfast): "Marie, what do you call this?"

Wife: "That is a loaf of brown bread of my own baking, John."

John opens window, and throws loaf of bread out. It kills a cab-horse. Great excitement. Missie inspected by local scientists, and unanimously pronounced a thunderbolt.

NEXT FRIDAY.

"PIRATE ISLAND."

COMPLETE.