

# CAPTAIN CAIN

PERCY WESTERMAN



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# CAPTAIN CAIN

BY  
PERCY F. WESTERMAN



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1939

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TORONTO



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# CAPTAIN CAIN

## CHAPTER I CAPTAIN CAIN REAPPEARS

“Now, you treacherous mutineers!” thundered Captain Cain, of the pirate submarine *Alerte*, “I’ll give you one minute to get your lifebelts. You’re to choose between being eaten by sharks or hanging by your necks in a British prison!”

Before the astounded men, who had so basely turned against their skipper, could realise the significance of the pirate captain’s words, Cain made for the only open hatchway. There he stopped, his eyes roving whimsically over the dumbfounded men, a supercilious smile lurking in his heavy bull-dog features.

“Forty-five seconds more!” announced Cain in cold, level tones.

The next instant Captain Cain disappeared from the view of the demoralised pirate crew. The conning-tower hatch descended with a metallic clang.

In the electrically lit interior he noticed that Barnard, the faithful boatswain, was at the wheels actuating the valves of the ballast tanks. Close to him stood the other loyal men, Davidge and Cross.

“Stand by!” ordered Cain, glancing at his wristlet watch.

“Ay, ay, sir,” replied the bo’sun, tentatively easing one of the valves a fraction of an inch.

Overhead came a terrific crash that shook the vessel from end to end.

Captain Cain raised one eyebrow—a favourite trick of his. He knew the significance of that detonation. The avenging cruiser *Canvey* had commenced to shell her victim. On the metallic deck overhead the shuffle of many boots told clearly enough that the miserable remnant of the mutineering crew was in a state of panic.

Again the pirate captain glanced at the watch, nodded curtly.

“Submerge: all tanks!” he ordered.

During the brief period between the giving of the order and the settling of the submarine on the bed of Bahia Arenas, Captain Cain remained as still and silent as a statue. His active mind was reviewing not only the present situation but practically the whole of the career of the vessel that was even now doomed to destruction.

He recalled the circumstances under which the scrapped submarine R 81 was

converted into a vessel, the *Alerte*, that looked like a tramp, but was actually an armed craft still retaining her diving capabilities. There was Pengelly, his second in command, that treacherous, incapable babbler who for a time had supplanted Cain as skipper of the *Alerte* to give place meekly to the indomitable captain when he found himself in a tight corner. . . . Then his mind dwelt upon the unexpected arrival of those two bright lads, Broadmayne and Vyse. They were, he remembered, a pretty tough proposition. His estimation of them was none the less on that account. . . . The *Alerte*'s successive scraps with the *Cap Hoorn*, the *Surcouf* and the *Villamel*, whereby Cain had aroused the ire of Germans, Frenchmen and Spaniards; the courteous treatment he had accorded to the Yankee *Bronx City*, and finally the mutiny and the pursuit by the British warship *Canvey* brought his hurried reminiscences down to the present moment.

In the back of his mind Captain Cain felt a slight resentment against the *Canvey*. In all his unlawful dealings he had studiously avoided any act of aggression that would affect British ships and shipping; and it seemed hardly poetic justice that the *Alerte* should be destroyed by the action of a vessel flying the white ensign. On the other hand, he realised that as a pirate every man's hand was 'gainst his; he was a fugitive, an outlaw either on the face of the waters or beneath the surface. In short, he was being treated as vermin to be exterminated without compunction.

A dull thud as the *Alerte* grounded upon the sandy bottom of the West African lagoon coincided with the conclusion of the pirate captain's train of thought. Although trapped in a steel cage, he was not "going out" without a desperate effort to save himself and the lives of the three loyal men who had risked everything on his behalf.

It was a decidedly lucky circumstance, whatever the cause, that the avenging cruiser had not continued to shell the *Alerte* as she submerged. Possibly, he decided, the white-livered mutineers had shown the white flag.

"You've got the rapid-flooding valve-plate, Barnard?" he inquired of the bo'sun. "Good, now listen; it's no use thinking that by lying doggo the cruiser will give us a miss; she won't. In a few minutes she'll start depth-charging us; so get busy. Now, all hands will don diving-dresses, and proceed through the air-lock. On gaining the bottom you will proceed to the starboard whaler, disconnect the release-gear and manhandle her along. With decent luck we ought to be well outside the radius of action of a depth-charge before they start operations. Yes, take your automatics and fifty rounds. Look lively, there!"

In record time the four men had put on their self-contained diving-dresses, adjusted the helmets and satisfied themselves that the air-supply contained in

reservoirs strapped to their backs was in working order.

Communication save by signs and tapping the metal head-gear was now out of the question. One after another the four entered the air-lock in which only a feeble electric lamp was burning. The water-tight door was closed. There was no need to secure it, for the pressure of the admitted water would quickly jamb it immovably against the bulkhead.

Then Cain opened a valve, admitting a steady flow of sea-water at high pressure. In less than a minute the pirate captain and his companions were immersed, the water thrusting strongly against their rubbered canvas suits and at the same time relieving the wearers of the hitherto handicapping weight of their leaden-soled boots and of the lumps of metal suspended from their corselets.

The light went out, apparently by the pressure of the water against the comparatively fragile bulb. For a few moments Cain fumbled for the locking gear that held the exterior door in position; found it and wrestled with the recalcitrant door. At last it swung open, revealing a greenish haze—the sunlit water at ten fathoms beneath the surface.

One by one the men made their way through the open door in the hull of the *Alerte*, the pirate captain being the last to leave his ship, and trod on the hard, sandy bottom of the bay. Their first instinct was to put as great a distance as possible between them and the doomed submarine in the least possible time, for at any moment might come a tremendous explosion that would destroy them in an instant. It required all the will-power at their command to follow their captain as he felt his way along the bilge-keel of the submerged vessel. To increase their alarm the water overhead was continually darkened by swiftly-moving objects, while occasionally hideously dismembered portions of what had once been their comrades sank slowly, to be followed in their descent by enormous sharks. Captain Cain and his companions had little difficulty in guessing at the fate of several of the mutineers.

At length the four survivors arrived at the starboard quarter of the *Alerte*. Twenty feet above their heads they could discern the outlines of the whaler—a steel-built boat from which a plate with the quick-flooding device had been surreptitiously removed and retained by the bo'sun just previous to the *Alerte*'s last submergence.

A wire rope trailed overside, its flake resting on the bottom. Seizing it, one of the men swarmed up with surprising ease, clambered over the gunwale and tripped the releasing gear. The whaler with the man in it dropped gently to the floor of the lagoon.

The boat was eighteen feet in length, built of pressed galvanised steel sheets, and provided with hermetically-sealed air-chambers that, although insufficient to impart

buoyancy, reduced the dead weight of the submerged craft to about forty pounds. This provision had been made in order to maintain as nearly as possible the *Alerte*'s metacentric height whether submerged or otherwise; and Captain Cain thanked his lucky stars for the foresight that was now reaping its reward, but in a different manner to that originally intended.

Davidge and Cross lifted one end of the whaler, one on either side of the bow thwart; Captain Cain and the bo'sun took the almost negligible weight of the after-end, and as quickly as their somewhat impeded movement would allow the four set off towards the shore—a distance of about half a mile.

The firm sandy bottom made good going. It was not uniformly shelving. In places there were depressions, in others submarine mounds that approached within three fathoms of the surface. Cain, as he occasionally checked his course by means of a luminous compass, realised that if the British cruiser had carried a seaplane, their chances of escape would have been minimised almost if not quite to zero. In places there were dense patches of weed and kelp which had to be avoided. Fortunately these grew in comparatively small and isolated groups, but had they stretched in long lines parallel with the beach it would have entailed long and possibly fruitless efforts to attempt to hack a way through the barrier of tenacious marine growth.

On and on the four plodded with their burden, expecting every moment to hear the terrific explosion that was to give the *Alerte* her *coup de grâce*, and perhaps to be hurled on their faces by the surge of violently displaced water. According to Cain's calculation they were already beyond the effective limit of the expected depth-charge, but the possibility of being severely shaken was still to be taken into account.

Almost at every step fishes of weird aspect darted frantically away at the approach of the unusual apparition. Gigantic crab, pausing at first to contemplate an onslaught or a possible victim, scuttled sideways for safety, leaving behind them a trail of stirred-up sand. Eels too, distorted by the water, glided to and fro, showing more daring than the rest of the submarine denizens of the lagoon.

Yet there was a noticeable absence of sharks. Although these fearsome creatures will hesitate to attack a diver, possibly on account of the huge and distorted appearance of the man in his copper helmet, they have been known to put up a terrible fight. The four men were thankful that no sharks did appear; but they knew that not so very far behind them a ghastly tragedy was being enacted in which easily-gotten food was the factor that had relieved them of the monster's presence.

The bed was now shelving rapidly. The depth had decreased to a maximum of three fathoms. Only a short distance separated the fugitives from the beach, and up

till now no explosion had taken place.

A fresh situation was thereby created. It wanted but an hour to sunset, but the rays of the setting orb were shining straight on to the shore, while the avenging cruiser would be silhouetted against the light. It was, consequently, a highly risky business for Captain Cain and his companions to emerge from the water. As likely as not their burnished copper helmets would be detected from the ship the moment they broke surface. Their only chance, short of remaining submerged until after sunset, was to attempt to find the mouth of a small river which Cain had previously noted. It flowed into the lagoon by means of a right-angled channel, the seaward side of which was screened by a ledge of rocks covered with reeds; but in the circumstances this shelter required some finding. They might easily miss it and perhaps skirt the coast in the opposite direction in a vain attempt to strike the bed of the stream.

At last the depth decreased to one and a half fathoms. It was inadvisable to proceed nearer in-shore. Cain decided that if direction had been fairly maintained during the submarine walk, the mouth of the river ought to be to the right.

It would have been a simple matter to wait until dark. There was an ample reserve of air in each of the reservoirs. But to Captain Cain inaction was almost unbearable. He was always fretting to be up and doing. Possessed of super-abundant energy, the ability to do without sleep for sixty hours at a stretch and to feel no ill-effect from it, and a restless disposition, he refused to take the simple path and wait. He wanted, if possible, to witness the destruction of the submarine upon which he had built his hopes of untold wealth—hopes that had crumpled to dust leaving him worse off than before.

A shipless, homeless fugitive, possessing nothing of material value but the diving-dress and the few things in his possession, Cain might well be forgiven if he had chucked up the sponge. The pirate captain had been cast in a stern mould. He realised that he was alive when almost every one else would consider him to be as dead as mutton. Not only alive; he stood a fair chance of going on living; and that qualification he considered to be half the battle. He meant by sheer grit and determination to win through and retrieve the disaster of his previous venture.

Although by no means a vindictive man, he smiled grimly when he thought of the fate of his partner, Paul Pengelly. He had distrusted the man from the very first.

“Hang it all!” he soliloquised. “Give me a fellow who can smile decently and not have a perpetual grin on his face like a sea-sick monkey. Well, Pengelly’s goose is cooked anyway. Either he’s food for shark or else he’s in the cells. There’s one satisfaction, I shan’t have to wring his neck, the double-faced swine!”

Signing to his companions to slue the boat round, Captain Cain shaped a fresh course parallel, as he hoped, to the beach. Before the party had traversed a hundred yards they found the sand giving place to black slime. By this time the sun's rays were so oblique that the bed of the lagoon was almost in darkness.

Davidge and Cross hesitated. They had struck the soft patch before the skipper and the bo'sun. Finding themselves in danger of becoming stuck in the ooze they dropped their burden.

The captain signed to his "opposite number" to stand easy, and made his way to where the two seamen were held up. He, too, went ankle-deep in the tenacious mud, but the discovery did not in the least cause him any anxiety. On the contrary, it indicated that he had found the object of his quest—the mouth of the stream.

Signing to Cross to take his place aft, Cain grasped the bow gunwale, and as soon as the others had taken up their share of the burden the party set off keeping to the edge of the well-defined mud. In another five minutes the captain found his helmet was only a few inches below the surface and that the sun was right in front of him instead of behind as hitherto. They were safely inside the mouth of the river.

Still exercising the strictest caution the men emerged, dragging the whaler until its snout was out of water. Then, standing in a ring, each diver unscrewed the observation window in the other's head-dress and removed the helmet.

On taking his bearings, Cain found that the party was screened from observation by the ridge of rocks which rose nearly twenty feet above the surface of the lagoon on one side and the muddy river on the other. Smartly he was divested of his diving-dress, and without waiting for the others climbed stiffly up the irregular wall of rock. Quick to take advantage of cover he made no attempt to stand, but, throwing himself flat upon the summit of the ridge, carefully parted the tall grass and reeds that obstructed his outlook.

What he saw did not surprise him, although it caused intense interest. The cruiser *Canvey* was under way, but instead of making seawards—which she would almost certainly do had her mission been accomplished—she was steaming slowly and almost bows on to the spot where the fugitives had taken refuge. At about a cable's length from her bows (although from Captain Cain's point of view it was difficult to estimate the distance correctly) floated a barrel on which was a staff with a square of bunting that hung listlessly in the motionless air. The pirate captain knew that the buoy marked the resting-place of the *Alerte*.

"She's not done in yet, sir," remarked Barnard, who had taken off his diving-suit and had just taken up a position a few feet from his captain.

"No," replied Cain shortly. "And don't flatten the grass down like that. We'll be

spotted if you aren't careful."

"Very good, sir," replied the bo'sun, and relapsed into silence.

Standing out boldly and darkly against the setting sun, the *Canvey* approached yet nearer to her unseen victim and increased speed. A heavy object leapt from her poop and struck the water, throwing up a shower of foam. The cruiser, starboarding helm, was rapidly turning to port when a tremendous upheaval of water was followed by the vibrating roar of the explosion of the depth-charge. The hitherto placid waters of the lagoon were violently agitated, miniature rollers breaking on the beach almost at the foot of the captain of the destroyed pirate submarine as if to bear tidings of the loss to the redoubtable Cain. Even the reeds swayed in the rush of displaced air following the concussion.

Barnard gave a sidelong glance at his superior officer. Not a muscle of Captain Cain's face twitched. With set jaw and unflickering eyelids he remained motionless—thinking, scheming.

A minute or so later the pirate skipper broke the silence.

"They're not wasting much time," he observed. "Apparently they're sending down a diver to make certain. . . . Well, Barnard, they won't find pieces of us."

The bo'sun nodded soberly.

"Think they'll send ashore to have a look round, sir?" he inquired.

"Might," admitted the captain. "If so, we'll have to make ourselves scarce and leave no tracks. But I fancy they're in a bit of a hurry. . . . Now, you men! Be careful. The light's playing right on us."

They waited and watched; saw the diving-party descend, reappear. Then the boats were hoisted up and turned in, and the *Canvey*, gathering way, swung about and headed for the entrance to the lagoon. A quarter of an hour later she was swallowed up in the rapidly growing darkness.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FUGITIVES

“Now, my lads!” exclaimed Captain Cain briskly. “We’re a quiet little party all alone. There’s no reason why we shouldn’t make ourselves comfortable.”

He sprang easily to his feet. The others, stiff with the prolonged spell of inaction following their strenuous efforts, got up slowly and fell to chafing their numbed limbs. They felt down and out. The exciting events of the last few days culminating in a dare-devil dash for safety from the doomed submarine had left them limp and disheartened. They were without food, without shelter, outcasts on a strange, inhospitable shore.

Cain’s energetic spirit never failed him. He knew only too well that in the present circumstances activity would be the only antidote to the poison of despair that was consuming the minds of his companions.

“Look lively, lads!” he said encouragingly. “We’ll get the boat up above high-water mark, and we’ll have a roof over our heads at all events. Has any one any ’bacca?”

Davidge produced about an ounce of dark twist in a disreputable-looking pouch. The others had to admit that they were without any of the fragrant and comforting weed.

“Too much of a lash top at the finish to think of that, sir,” added Cross.

“Then ’tis as well I thought for you,” rejoined the captain, with a laugh. “I took the precaution of putting a couple of pounds of flake in one of my pockets—and matches in a damp-proof case. So up with the boat, my lads, and then spell-ho and a quiet smoke.”

It was an easy though somewhat lengthy task to get the boat up the beach. Thanks to the fact that the valve-plate had been removed, the men were spared the irksome business of baling. As they dragged the boat a foot at a time up the shelving beach, the water ran away rapidly, and by the time the whaler’s heel was clear of the river, she had drained herself. Then, as a matter of precaution, the valve-plate was bolted in position so that the boat would be ready for use when required. She was then turned bottom up and supported with her gunwale about a couple of feet from the ground by means of piled-up stones.

Tobacco was then served out, and all hands had a much-needed “stand-easy.” They smoked almost in silence, except for an occasional comment that for the most part failed to elicit a response.

Although he was impatient to disclose his immediate plans, Captain Cain wisely forbore to put the case before his men at this stage of the proceedings. He was content with the knowledge that they were in a better frame of mind, thanks to the soothing influence of the tobacco. Daylight, and with it food (for he was confident that although they were now hungry there was no prospect of starvation), would put a different complexion on things, especially after a night's rest.

"Now to sleep, lads!" he announced, when the glowing bowls were extinguished. "I'm going to keep watch."

"But——" protested the bo'sun.

"I'm keeping watch," reiterated the skipper firmly. "If you like to relieve me at two bells (5 a.m.) for a couple of hours, Barnard, that's all I'll want."

The two seamen also expressed their readiness to stand a trick, but Cain would have none of it. It was an easy sacrifice on his part, and daylight would bring its reward in the form of a tolerant and easily persuaded audience.

With his loaded automatic in the right-hand pocket of his coat, Cain crawled from underneath the whaler and began to pace to and fro. It was a sultry night, and in the captain's opinion it was infinitely preferable to patrol the stretch of firm level sand to being cooped up underneath the upturned boat.

Overhead the stars shone brilliantly with the customary splendour of tropic climes. Not a breath of wind disturbed the palm trees, not a ripple lapped the edge of the lagoon, although the surf boomed sullenly against the outlying reef. A faint sickly smell from the mangroves hung in the still air. The only sound of life was the stertorous breathing of the now sleeping men and the *ping* of the deadly mosquitoes.

In his silent beat Cain was thinking deeply. He summed up the present situation with merciless accuracy. Here he was with three companions of a different social standing. They were practically stranded on a deserted stretch of coast miles from the nearest British stations on the Gambia. Nearer, of course, were the French outposts on either side of Cape Verde, but Cain meant to give them a wide berth.

He made a mental stocktaking. The sole assets of the fugitives were the clothes they stood up in, four diving-suits, now not likely to be required, automatic pistols and ammunition, a couple of knives, a few personal effects of little value, and the boat with her equipment—oars, crutches, baler and compass—all of which had been secured to prevent loss when the *Alerte* submerged.

Within a few miles was the spot where Pengelly had buried a quantity of loot from the captured Yankee ship, *Bronx City*. Amongst the plunder there might be something of practical use. Cain decided to burke his scruples concerning American-owned booty. After all, he decided, he didn't plunder the vessel: that was the work

of his treacherous partner. It was now a case of needs must, as far as Cain was concerned.

Then the pirate captain's thoughts turned to the future. He was an outlaw. He could never return to England. Officially, he supposed, he was dead. That gave him a new lease of life, a suggestion that seemed somewhat a paradox. He had—or he hoped he had—money safely invested in South America. Could he but lay hands on it, he would be content to settle down to a relatively quiet life in a foreign land. Then there were the men who had stuck to him through thick and thin, and who, he confidently expected, would continue to do so. Well, he wasn't going to let them down; his perverted code of honour was sufficiently straight to urge him to see that, to the best of his power, they should receive a fitting reward for their loyalty and devotion.

A mosquito settled on the captain's cheek. He caught and ground it between his powerful fingers because it irritated him. Although fully aware of the risk of malaria communicated by these tropical pests, it was not fear that prompted the action. Cain thought himself immune—he had been salted years before. To him the attention of the mosquito was symbolic of a difficulty to be brushed aside firmly and resolutely.

Suddenly the steadily-flowing river was rippled by something that attracted the captain's attention. An ordinary person might not have noticed the diverging wake under the starlit sky. He paused and regarded the movement intently; his hand fingered the butt of his automatic.

Then, above the surface, emerged a long dark object—something endowed with life. It was an enormous crocodile. Slowly it drew itself clear, appeared to sniff the miasmic air appreciatively, and proceeded to make its way towards the whaler and the men sleeping soundly beneath its shelter.

Cain might have aroused his men, but that would disturb their well-earned rest; the same objection applied to the use of the automatic, a relatively feeble weapon of offence against the armour-plated brute. Besides, he was loth to make use of firearms lest there be any human inhabitants, and he had no wish to attract the attention of any one to the refugees on the beach of Bahia Arenas.

With a quick, decisive movement Cain withdrew his hand from his pocket, stooped and picked up a couple of pebbles, each nearly as large as his fist. Coolly and deliberately, as if he were driving off an inquisitive dog, Cain strode to meet the saurian. The brute halted and raised its scaly head. Cain could see its small beady eyes blinking in the starlight. Then, resuming its struggling motion, the brute advanced with wide-open jaws, Cain also maintained his forward movement and hurled one of the stones at the crocodile's mouth. Ere the missile struck, the brute had snapped its

jaws. The stone clattered and glanced harmlessly from the protective plating over the skull. It stopped; then prepared to close.

At less than three yards distance Cain, with all the force of his muscular arm, sent the second stone hurling through the air. This time the missile hit the brute fairly on the point of the lower jaw. So severe was the impact that the thrower had good reason to believe that it was one of the crocodile's teeth that had "carried away."

The reptile had had enough. Lashing its tail furiously as a defence against a rear attack, it turned and made for the river. Not content with his success, Cain followed, picking up stones as he went and hurling them at the discomfited brute, until with a tremendous succession of splashes it took refuge in the water.

Captain Cain's act of deliberate audacity had not passed unnoticed, although he was in absolute ignorance of the fact.

Barnard, the bo'sun, roused from his sleep, had seen his skipper secure his missiles. Realising that there was something of a dangerous nature on hand, the bo'sun crawled from under the whaler and quietly followed in Cain's tracks. He saw the crocodile. His hand flew to the butt of his automatic. But when the pirate captain advanced with the utmost intrepidity, Barnard brought up all standing, but ready at the critical moment to rush to the other's aid.

When the saurian turned and retreated, pursued by a steady discharge of stones, the bo'sun promptly returned to his bed of sand.

"'Strewhth," he muttered, "that chap's got nerves of iron! He's the horse for my money. I'd follow him from now till the crows come home."

The pirate captain resumed his beat. For more than an hour nothing occurred to disturb the train of his thoughts. He was beginning to feel tired—a sensation of lassitude confined solely to his legs, although his brain was as active as ever. He missed the "give" of a deck; even the firm sand seemed hard and unyielding compared with the limited promenade afforded by the *Alerte*'s bridge.

Another dark object attracted his attention—this time on the seaward side of the tongue of land. At the sight of it, Cain's eyes glinted with satisfaction, for the inverted dish-like creature was a turtle—and turtle meant nourishing food.

He stopped, turned and stole softly to the whaler, and without disturbing the sleepers secured one of the stout ash oars. Armed with this, he made straight for the water's edge. The turtle was then about fifty yards away and crawling awkwardly up the belt of sand.

Cain waited patiently until he knew he was certain to cut off the animal's retreat; then he dashed straight for it. Thrusting the loom of the oar underneath the turtle, the captain levered his prize over on its back. In that position it was helpless, its head

and flippers floundering in the air in a vain endeavour to right itself. With one blow of his knife, Cain severed the turtle's vertebra, cleaned and folded the blade, and resumed his vigil.

Once only during the long night did he consult his watch. He was not far out in his estimate. It was a quarter to five.

At the hour he roused Barnard by a firm pressure on the man's hand—a sure way to awake a sleeper without causing him to start or call out.

"Two bells!" whispered Cain, and backed out to await the bo'sun's appearance.

"You may have a bit of a bother with crocodiles, Barnard," he remarked. "On the other hand, you may not. If you do, don't shoot on any account. Unless you hit the brute in the eye or throat you'd merely irritate the thing. In any case, I don't want any firing, but call me. You understand?"

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Barnard.

"Have you a watch?" asked Cain.

"I have, sir," answered the bo'sun, "but something's gone wrong with it since we left the ship."

"Then take this one," rejoined the captain. "Call all hands, myself included, at six bells."

Thirty seconds later, Cain was in a sound, dreamless sleep, as if he had not a care or a worry in the wide world; nor did he stir until the bo'sun's time-honoured call of "Show a leg, there!" brought him back to wakefulness, refreshed in mind and body to assume the responsibilities of another day.

"Now, grub, lads!" he announced. "Davidge, you start a fire; boil some of the turtle in the baler, and try your hand at frying turtle steaks. Cross will bear a hand. Mr. Barnard, I want you to come with me. Unless I'm much mistaken, we'll find some corn-stuff over there."

The bo'sun chuckled to himself.

"The Old Man's finding his feet again," he soliloquised. "He's started to call me 'Mister' again."

Cain's surmise proved to be correct, for on a fairly open patch of ground that extended a long way into the forest he found plenty of wild maize, and in the forest itself a species of tree bearing something that had a close resemblance to the bread-fruit of the Pacific Islands.

"Think it's safe to eat it, sir?" queried Barnard doubtfully.

"I'll start on it, anyway," decided the skipper. "If it don't turn me up within the next twelve hours, I think you need have no fear about eating it."

They came back laden with the fruit and sheaves of ripe maize, to find that the

cooks were well advanced with their task. The savoury smell greeted their nostrils a good fifty yards away.

"This is what I calls all right, sir," said Davidge, with a grin. "I could stick this out for a month of Sundays."

"That's good, then," rejoined the captain, although he was quite aware that turtle as an article of food for any continuous length of time speedily becomes objectionable. He remembered that there have been instances in which crews have mutinied on account of their being supplied with turtle instead of beef. But the principal business at the present moment was to give the men a satisfying and appetising meal—the surest method of getting the men to fall in with his plans for the immediate future.

## CHAPTER III

### VANISHED PLUNDER

“Now, lads!” began Captain Cain briskly, as the men, their hunger appeased, were once more indulging in the luxury known to blue-jackets as “three draws and a spit.” “We’ll hold a council of war. I said ‘council of war’ purposely, because, as you are aware, we’re at war with mankind. We’re fugitives on the face of the earth. The wilds of Australia or the backwoods of Canada are as dangerous to us as the heart of London—perhaps more so, since the world is small when one doesn’t want it to be. The general presumption is that we’re dead, lying six fathoms deep out there; but that doesn’t justify our going home quietly and turning over a new leaf. In short, we’re forced to live on our wits, and if necessary use brute strength to obtain the direst necessities of life.

“Now, then, I’ve been thinking things out. As you know, that rogue, Pengelly, cached a lot of booty taken from the *Bronx City*. The spot is within six miles of here. I mean to find the stuff, which will, I hope, provide sufficient for our immediate needs. There’s gold dust, I believe, although I didn’t actually see it.”

“Quite right, sir,” agreed Cross; “I seed Pengelly and a party hide the loot. Afterwards ’e gave every man a chance to make a note of the bearings in case of accident.”

“And probably gave the wrong bearings,” added Cain. “However, he’s not likely to be hanging around over Tom Tiddler’s ground—something will be hanging round his neck before very long, unless I’m very much mistaken. But to proceed. We’ve a boat in which we ought to be able to make our way to within a few miles of the Gambia. There we ought with luck to be able to be picked up by a vessel bound for South America. We must decide what yarn to pitch into them later on. Once in South America there’ll be heaps of opportunities of making a fortune in a very little while. How? you ask. Wait for the first revolution that crops up. You won’t have to wait very long. Then seize opportunity with both hands, especially if opportunity is ballasted with gold.

“In any case, you stick to me, and I’ll stick to you, and pull you through. You’ve all been proper jonnick in the past, and I won’t forget it. You know I’m a man of my word. Now it’s close on dead low water. In half an hour the young flood will be setting up the Faltuba River, so let’s get a move on.”

The boat was righted and launched. A quantity of maize was placed in the after-locker and a plentiful supply of turtle flesh hung up to dry in the now powerful rays of

the sun. Each man examined and cleaned his pistol so as to be prepared for any emergency that might involve the use of the weapons.

By this time the tide had changed. All along the shore the sand was discoloured by a dark line—oil from the depth-charged submarine that had drifted ashore during the night. A hundred yards or so away was a barrel with a sodden, smoke-begrimed piece of bunting hanging disconsolately from a staff passing through the bung. It was the mark-buoy the *Canvey* had laid down to indicate the position of the submerged *Alerte*. Of other flotsam there was no sign.

It required quite a tough tussle with the oars to take the whaler out of the mouth of the little river, but once on the lagoon progress was easy, especially as the estuary of the Faltuba was reached. Every one, Cain included, took a turn at the oars, and although no great amount of energy was displayed, the task soon became decidedly exhausting.

The sun beat down with terrific violence, and the only protection for the man's heads was the red woollen caps they had hastily put on when they made their hurried exit from the doomed submarine. Their feet, too, were bare, the men having discarded their ordinary foot-gear when they put on their diving-suits.

Not only were the direct rays of the sun unpleasantly hot. The reflected glare from the mirror-like surface of the water was almost as fierce. The metal-work of the boat was so hot that to touch it with the bare hand would result in a painful blister.

Presently the sandy shores of the lagoon gave place to the mud-banked, mangrove-bounded river. Here the conditions were worse, for added to the heat in the sickly miasmic mist that ascended in dense columns from the now turgid water, to disperse before it rose high enough to form a screen to the rays of the sun.

The river had afforded a depressing aspect when viewed from the *Alerte*; now viewed but a few feet from the water's edge it looked the absolute limit of desolation and discomfort.

"Nearly there, sir," announced Barnard. The bo'sun was rowing stroke. He had wiped the perspiration from his eyes by the simple expedient of rubbing them with the moist sleeve of his shirt. For the last quarter of an hour he had been rowing blindly, for the sweat was pouring down his face. "Just round that bend. A couple o' hundred yards, or three, maybe."

Cain grunted. In spite of the physical strength and grim determination he was feeling the effect of the hothouse-like conditions; but realising that he could stand it far better than either Davidge or Cross, he was voluntarily extending his spell at the heavy ash oar.

The bend negotiated, the landing-place appeared in sight, but now an unexpected hitch occurred. The booty had been taken ashore from the *Alerete* at about high-water. It was now only the second hour of the flood, and a hundred yards of soft, vilely-smelling mud separated the water from the river-bank. To attempt to traverse that distance even by the aid of boards was impossible. The slime was so soft that an oar thrust blade downwards as far as the loom met with little resistance and failed to find hard bottom.

There was nothing for it but to wait until the tide rose sufficiently to float the whaler over the mud. That meant at least three hours of tedious inaction in the miasmic air.

Thrusting an oar into the mud and bending the painter to it the men let the whaler swing to the strong flood-tide, hoping fervently that this flimsy mooring would hold. Then they prepared to endure the discomforts as best they might.

At the captain's suggestion they stretched their diving-suits from gunwale to gunwale to form some sort of protection from the sun, as the men lay in the bottom-boards. The rubbered canvas *did* serve as a shade, but underneath the air was stifling. Myriads of flies appeared and added to the general discomfort. They settled on hands, feet and faces until the sun-scorched flesh was black with the troublesome insects. It was almost useless to attempt to brush them away, for the next instant the flies swarmed again to the attack. To make matters worse, the sun-dried turtle flesh turned putrid and added its quota to the variety of offensive odours. The meat was promptly ditched.

In vain the men tried to smoke. Flies hovered over the glowing pipe-bowls, collapsing in dozens upon the hot tobacco. Even Davidge, who in times of shortage had been known to smoke a weird mixture of tea-leaves and rope-yarn, drew the line at flies in his pipe.

Hardly a word was spoken. With parched mouths and swollen tongues the men sat in silence, looking from time to time with blood-shot eyes at the slowly rising level of the water and at the tardy retreat of that expanse of mud which separated them from the key that was to open for them the gate of fresh adventure and good fortune.

“‘S’pose tide’ll make high enough, sir?” hazarded the bo’sun.

Cain nodded.

“Bound to,” he replied shortly. “New moon was the day before yesterday.”

In any case, he mused, they would have to be mighty smart in recovering the booty, if they didn’t want the whaler left high and dry for another ten hours.

“Ditch-crawling isn’t in my line,” he concluded. “Give me the open sea any day of the week. Confound the mud!”

At an hour before the expected time of high-water, Cain roused himself. The flood-tide had eased off considerably, although there was a distinct strain on the painter. The loom of the oar was six feet beneath the surface.

"We can do it now, men!" he declared.

The others bestirred themselves. The oar was recovered and the boat urged shorewards. Thirty feet from the bank she smelt the mud.

"Keep going!" shouted the captain, and leaning forward he lent his weight to the stroke oar. Finally the whaler lost way ten feet from the shore with a bank of liquid mud of her own making showing up on either side.

"Try with an oar for 'ard!" ordered Cain.

The blade struck hard bottom at eighteen inches.

"Good enough!" declared the captain, and using the oar as a jumping-pole he cleared the remaining expanse of slime, landing cleanly on the hard ground. Davidge followed, and having thrown the slack of the painter ashore, Cross rejoined his chum. The bo'sun was the last to essay the feat, landing on all-fours in six inches of particularly obnoxious slime.

The painter having been secured to a snag, the whole party hurried to the spot where Pengelly had buried the booty. Barnard had not the slightest doubt that he would be able to recognise the spot without the aid of cross-bearings.

"There it is, sir!" he exclaimed. "In that hollow."

Notwithstanding the heat, the party broke into a run. Cain was the first to reach the much-desired site. When he did, he stopped dead.

So did the others. The soil had only recently been disturbed, but disturbed it had been. Instead of an almost imperceptible mound already covered with coarse vegetation, a yawning cavity was exposed to view, but of the eagerly-wished-for plunder not a sign!

For full thirty seconds no one spoke. The eyes of the other three travelled first from the rifled hiding-place to the impassive features of the captain and then back to the scene of their shattered hopes. After all their endeavours, their discomforts and their sanguine expectations was this to be their reward?

"Some one's been 'ere afore us!" exclaimed Cross.

"Quite a logical statement supported by circumstantial evidence," rejoined Captain Cain dryly.

"Eh, what, sir?" asked the man. "I don't quite ketch wot you mean, sir."

"Merely that I agree with your remark," replied the captain.

"Who could it have been?" queried the bo'sun. "'Tain't Pengelly or any of the others: that's a dead cert. Do you think, sir, that some of them blabbed to the

skipper of the cruiser and he sent a boat back after dark?"

"No, I do not," declared Cain. "The *Canvey* cleared right off. I was keeping watch all night. It was bright starlight. Nothing could have crossed the lagoon without being sighted. It's the natives who have collared the loot. Ten to one they were watching everything that occurred and had the stuff up the moment the *Alerete* went downstream. For all we know, they may be keeping us under observation at the present moment."

"An' larfin' fit to bust their sides," added Cross. "That is if a blessed savage can enjoy a joke. I'd like to ketch 'em at it; that's all."

"Well, it's no use hanging on to the slack, men," decided Cain briskly. "Success never comes by giving way before difficulties. We've got to surmount them. If we stand here kagging much longer the tide will leave the boat high and dry. Our best plan is to get out of this cursed river as quickly as we can. Then we can make a fresh start on another tack. If we don't succeed, then my name's not—what it is."

## CHAPTER IV

### CAIN AND THE SCHOONER

It was not yet high tide, but already the fresh water descending the river was stronger than the sea water carried up on the flood. In consequence, the boat made steady progress, the rowers sticking gamely to their task in spite of the heat. They realised that the sooner they gained the shore of the lagoon the better, since they would be free to rest without stifling in a miasmic hothouse.

Although bitterly disappointed at the knowledge that all their discomforts were in vain, they were buoyed up by their captain's optimism. One word of dismay from his lips would have figuratively "knocked the bottom out of everything." Only the coolness and seeming indifference to the stroke of ill-luck had kept his men from the depths of despair. More than that, he had encouraged them to expect success in the next enterprise, whatever that might be.

At length the whaler was grounded at the resting-place of the previous night. Removing the gear, the men hauled her up above high-water mark and turned her keel uppermost.

"There's one blessing, sir," remarked Barnard. "Built of steel, she won't split open in the heat same as if she'd been built of wood; but I reckon it'll be pretty baking underneath her."

"I don't advise you to try it," replied Cain. "At least, not until the sun goes down. We'll have to stick it till then, but there is no reason why we shouldn't knock together some sort of shelter and roof it with palm leaves."

It was not until late in the afternoon that the men bestirred themselves to gather more maize and procure water that might by courtesy be termed fresh, although it was warm and brackish.

"Happen we might get another turtle to-night," suggested the bo'sun. "If we're lucky, I'll salt some of it down. There is a dip in the rocks over there where there's a tidy lot of salt. You were saying something about a voyage in the boat, sir. I've been thinking: how about fresh water? The balerful won't last long, especially if the sun starts drying it up."

"Do you know what a gourd is, Mr. Barnard?" asked Cain. "A husk enclosing a vegetable somewhat resembling a cucumber. There are hundreds on the edge of the maize-patch. They'll make excellent water-carriers. Now, listen: we'll have the next twenty-four hours to rest, sleep and obtain food and water sufficient to provision the boat for a week. At this time to-morrow, if the weather holds fair, we'll start. I'm not

keen on putting into Gambia, especially if people there are still discussing the *Alerte*. They might ask awkward questions. We'll stand off the land a bit and trust to luck to sight a vessel bound south—a sailing-craft for preference, or, next to that, a small tramp, provided she's not British. There are craft constantly running up and down between European ports and The Coast. We'll be distressed mariners. The yarn will serve if we all pitch it right. If they treat us decently, well and good; if not—well, there'll be considerable trouble to those who ask for it."

As soon as the sun had set, Cain turned in, after giving instructions that he was to be roused at midnight to take Middle Watch, Davidge and Cross being "on" till eight bells (12 o'clock) and Barnard to relieve the captain at 4 a.m.

The night passed practically without incident, except that the bo'sun succeeded in intercepting and capturing a turtle.

The greater part of the next day was spent under cover, the rough-and-ready screens of palm leaves affording a much-needed protection against the rays of the sun.

At five o'clock in the afternoon the whaler was launched, twenty gallons of fresh water in gourds being placed on board, together with turtle flesh, maize and a quantity of the supposed bread-fruit, which the men could eat without fear of poisoning, since Cain's experiment had not resulted in any ill-effects.

As soon as this task was completed the adventurers pushed off under oars. A light off-shore wind was blowing, and in consequence the absence of a mast and sail was greatly deplored.

Half-way across the lagoon, the diving-dresses were thrown over the side. Weighted by copper helmets and leaden-soled boots they sank at once.

"Chuck money away, sir," remarked the bo'sun. "They'd fetch no end of dollars at any port in South America."

"Quite," agreed Cain. "But it's evidence that's best got rid of. It would require a very smart man to explain to the biggest blockhead that ever held command of a ship how wrecked boat's crew come to be shipmates with four diving-dresses."

"Ay, ay, sir; of course," rejoined Barnard. "But if it comes to that, how do we explain away the whaler? Steel boats with flooding valves aren't the general run in ships."

"They're pretty common on The Coast," said Cain.

"Yes, sir; but supposin' we're picked up by a vessel bound for Accra or Cape Coast Castle? Like as not we'll be delayed there long enough for inquiries to be made."

"There I agree again," replied the captain. "I had hoped that the boat would pay

for our passage. As it is, we'll have to sink her just before we're picked up."

The whaler had hardly crossed the bar and begun to lift to the long Atlantic rollers when darkness set in. It was a bright starlit night, and since a strictly accurate course was not essential the compass was dispensed with as an aid to direction. Instead of peering into the unlighted bowl the captain steered by the stars, keeping a course approximately due west.

He knew that there was little chance of being sighted by a large vessel. These invariably kept far off the ill-lighted coast. Even small craft, sailing-vessels especially, rarely approached within twenty miles until they were abreast of the ports to which they were bound.

Cain counted on falling in with a sailing-craft once he was clear of the belt of water where baffling wind alternating with prolonged calms were the order of things. He had no intention of finding himself on board a vessel equipped with wireless with the ultimate prospect of finding the police awaiting him on the quayside. By this time the news of the destruction of the *Alerte* and the conjectured death of the pirate captain and three of the crew would be wirelessed all over the world; and it would be a difficult business to have to explain to the master of a vessel possessing that information how four men picked up in the vicinity of Bahia Arenas had no connection with the destroyed pirate submarine.

At dawn, Cain calculated that they were between thirty-five and forty miles from the coast. The weather continued fine, but there were heavy rollers that presaged a severe blow before very long. The red sky just before the sun rose above the horizon told the experienced men that ere long dirty weather would set in as clearly as if they had been provided with the most delicate barometric appliances.

Not a vessel was in sight. Sea and sky met in an unbroken circular horizon.

The three men looked decidedly uneasy. They knew that there was bad weather not far ahead. They were aware that even if they attempted to retrace their course the heavy swell would make it impossible for the whaler to effect a landing. She would be capsized before she got within half a mile of the beach, and the sharks would quickly put an end to any attempt at swimming on the part of the crew.

"It's all right, men," said Cain, noting the expressions on their faces. "We're in for a blow, I admit; but we'll be picked up before then."

A couple of hours later the captain's prophecy looked like fulfilment. Away to the nor'ard a sail showed on the horizon. Half an hour more and the sail resolved itself into a topsail schooner close hauled on the starboard tack, for shortly after sunrise the wind had veered round and now blew sou'west. Provided the schooner held on her course, which was extremely likely, she would pass within a mile to

wind'ard of the boat.

"She'll sight us in half a shake," declared the bo'sun.

"Then ditch all the grub," ordered Cain. "We don't need to explain how we've got a collection of West African vegetables on board. Fill the baler with water and throw the gourds overboard. . . . No, not yet . . . wait till we're in the trough of the sea. They might have a glass bearing on us."

Taking advantage of the schooner being regularly hidden by the crest of a huge roller, the men in the whaler threw overboard everything that would be likely to contradict their statement that they were the survivors of the s.s. *Teglease*, of Cardiff, for Cape Coast Castle, which had foundered after collision with an unknown vessel fifty miles off Cape Verde. Then, hoisting a shirt at the end of the boat-hook, they awaited developments.

"She's sighted us, lads!" exclaimed Cain.

The schooner was taking in her topsails, at the same time altering helm to pass slightly to lee'ard of the whaler.

When less than a cable's length away she hove-to, and a picturesquely-garbed, bearded fellow waved to the boat to close.

"We're in luck!" exclaimed Cain. "She's a Greek, or I'm a Dutchman. Smartly there with that valve when I give the sign."

Cain was at the helm, Barnard pulling stroke and Davidge bow. Cross was standing by to receive a line from the schooner.

Then came a neat little piece of deception. Awaiting his opportunity as the schooner rolled towards the boat, Cain put the helm over. The whaler ran alongside under the schooner's main chain-plates, which as she rolled gave the boat's gunwale a sharp blow. Immediately the bo'sun bent forward and opened the flooding valve.

"Jump for it, lads!" shouted Cain in well-feigned alarm. "She's stove in!"

The men made a frantic leap for the rail, Cain, being the last to leave, grasping the channel irons of the schooner as she began to recover from her roll. Even as he hoisted himself on to the chain-plates the whaler disappeared beneath the surface.

"Pigs!" howled the Greek skipper, furious at the loss of what appeared to be a serviceable boat which he could have had hoisted in and subsequently sold for a good sum at the first port he touched. "You losa good boata! Ver' much money alla gone. 'Oo you? Vere you froma come?"

"Run down the night before last," replied Cain, swallowing the insult of the epithet.

"Run down, ah! You wanna me give you passage. 'Ow mucha you pay?"

"We haven't a red cent between the lot of us," declared the late captain of the

## *Alerte.*

The Greek shrugged his shoulders. He could not refuse to take the supposed shipwrecked mariners on board. Presumably the owners of the lost vessel would pay for the men's food and other items, but his owners, Papedouloukos Frères of the Piræus, would stick to any money paid on that account. He, Captain Georgeos Sepotos of the schooner *Nike*, did not feel at all anxious to increase the coffers of his employer over that business, however much he wanted to fill his own. The loss of a good boat, too, had shattered his dream of making a bit on his own account; while, to put the lid on everything, the men he was about to succour were, according to their own declaration, penniless.

"Verra good!" exclaimed Captain Georgeos Sepotos. "You maka work ze ship, you know anyting abouta machinery? We hef no engineer of much use. Motor it no maka move."

"I'll see what I can do, Cap'n," said Cain very mildly. "Of course you don't want to use it in a steady breeze like this."

"No, but I wanna fit to go ready when no breeze is," rejoined Sepotos. "Go for'ard an' getta food. Den you will work."

Cain and his companions went for'ard, where they were given a meal consisting chiefly of goats' flesh, biscuit and olives. Of the seven hands berthed before the mast only one had a slight smattering of English, and, judging by the appearance of the crew, they were a pretty villainous lot. On the other hand, Cain and his companions in misfortune might well be taken for what they actually were—pirates. A stubby beard of four days' growth, features tanned by salt spray and sun to the colour of rich mahogany, clothes dirty and ragged, their red worsted caps, all combined to make them look almost as villainous as the motley-garbed Levantines.

It puzzled Captain Cain considerably to know why a small topsail schooner hailing from the Piræus should be so far down the West African coast. Usually Grecian sailing-craft confine their activities, legitimate or otherwise, to the Mediterranean. He made up his mind to find out. Incidentally he had already decided to make the Greek skipper "sit up" before very long.

After the sorry meal, which was served in an appallingly squalid fo'c'sle, Cain was told to go below to the motor-room, while Barnard was ordered to take a trick at the helm, and the other two told off to assist in working the ship.

It did not take Cain long to discover what was wrong with the engine—a decrepit four-cylinder motor of an obsolete French pattern. The so-called engineer previously responsible for the running or non-running of the outfit had cherished the totally mistaken theory that timing-gear should be liberally lubricated. In a few

minutes Cain, with the aid of petrol and rag, had cleaned out the ignition system and had succeeded in getting the motor to fire. This done, he deliberately altered the timing, as he felt certain that this slight derangement would be quite beyond the skill of the Greek engineer to rectify.

He then reported to Captain Sepotos that the motor was fit to run, inquired where the *Nike* was bound, and was told to ask no questions, but to go for'ard.

Cain did so. For the present it was quite in the scheme of things for him to knuckle under. Rather grimly he wondered what the Greek would think if he knew that four of the crew of the pirate submarine was aboard, and that each possessed a deadly automatic pistol.

For the next three days nothing of consequence occurred. The wind increased to gale force, but the *Nike* carried on under close-reefed fore-and-aft canvas and made fairly good weather of it. Amongst other things that Cain discovered by casual conversation with the English-speaking Greek in the fo'c'sle was that the *Nike* was laden with cheap and inferior whisky to be surreptitiously sold to the natives of Belgian Congo; and with obsolete rifles of Russian manufacture for the same sort of customers—the sale of both articles to blacks being strictly prohibited. Nevertheless, the trade could be carried on with slight risk and at an enormous profit.

It soon became evident that Captain Georgeos Sepotos was continually going out of his way to insult the Englishmen. Not only did he curse them without stint; he made a point of compelling them to undertake the most unnecessary and degrading tasks he could think of, testing Cain's forbearance almost to breaking-point by making remarks in Greek to various members of the crew, and holding up the British nation and Cain and his companions in particular to derision. Although none of the four understood Greek, it was not a matter of impossibility to realise the nature of Captain Sepotos' remarks.

Cain still held himself under control.

The climax came on the fourth day after the rescue. The *Nike* was then within eighty miles of Sierra Leone. The gale had blown itself out, and the schooner was crawling along at a couple of knots under every stitch of canvas she could possibly set.

Davidge had been sent with others to the topsail yard. Although a seaman, he had never served in a sailing-craft, and a knowledge of "masts and yards" was a mystery to him. Nevertheless, he went aloft, bungled badly, and received a torrent of abuse from the Greek skipper.

On the principle that "hard words break no bones," Davidge ignored the outburst, merely replying with what in naval and military description is known as

“dumb insolence.”

As the Englishman turned to go for’ard, Sepotos dealt him a heavy kick that almost sent him on his face. Cain, standing by, gave one glance at Barnard—a glance that meant volumes; then striding up to the Greek skipper he struck him fairly and squarely upon the point of the jaw.

Too late did Sepotos’ hand jumble for the hilt of his ready knife. Lifted clean off his feet by the force of the blow, he traversed a good three yards in a beautiful parabola before his oily head came in violent contact with the trunk of a pump. There he lay down and out with the blood oozing from his mouth and nose.

Those of the crew on deck were too dumbfounded to speak or move. Long before they recovered their senses the four Englishmen, shoulder to shoulder, had the foreigners covered by the sinister muzzles of their automatics.

“Hands up!” roared Cain.

The meaning was plain enough, even though the Greeks, with one exception, were ignorant of English.

At a word from the pirate captain, Davidge made a tour round the deck, relieving each Greek of his sheath-knife and tossing it overboard. This done, Davidge was posted at the helm, the man whose place he had taken being ordered for’ard with the others.

“We’ve done it!” declared Cain. “They’ve been jolly well asking for it ever since we came aboard—and now they’ve got it! Cross!”

“Ay, ay, sir!”

“Throw a bucket of water over that carrion,” ordered Cain, pointing to the still prostrate Captain Sepotos. “He can very well do with a wash. Inform me when he recovers.”

“That was some hit, that, sir,” exclaimed Cross admiringly. “Fair on the point it was, pretty as you’d see anywhere. Guess you’ve done him in, sir.”

“Nonsense,” replied Cain. “If I had hit him hard, then—Bring him round, Cross. I want to get the job squared up.”

In about a quarter of an hour, during which time the Greek crew were huddled for’ard like sheep, Sepotos sat up and took notice. He did not seem at all satisfied with the result of his investigations. He was cowed utterly.

“Now, you bundle of vermin!” exclaimed Cain. “In ten minutes you will be over the side—understand?”

“Mercy, sah!” almost shrieked the terror-stricken Greek. “Do not murder——”

“Who said anything about murder,” interrupted the pirate captain. “Hold your jaw and listen. You and your scum will be put into a boat. You can provision her and

take in sufficient fresh water for four days. Freetown's a matter of ninety miles to the nor' east; you'll make it in three days, if you get busy. We're taking possession of the schooner. As far as you're concerned she's lost. You can pitch your own yarn about that, but I don't advise you to tell the truth. You're a spirit smuggler and gun-runner. If the British authorities find that out it's a stiff term of imprisonment you'll get. Savvy?"

Sepotos nodded feebly. He quite understood. He was like a toad under a harrow. If he denounced Cain and a British cruiser were sent to put the *Nike* under arrest, he would have to appear as a witness. In that case the whole story of his illicit practices would come out. The schooner would be seized and the cargo confiscated, and he would get a long term of penal servitude. In any case the *Nike* was lost to him. Better, he decided, to announce that she had been sunk, than to risk imprisonment in addition to the loss of the ship.

"I onnerstanda," muttered the Greek.

"I knew you would," rejoined Cain grimly. "Take my advice and make your men stick to the same yarn, or you'll find yourself in prison within a week. Now, then, order your men to lower the longboat, and send a couple of hands below to serve out four days' provisions. I'll give you ten minutes."

With greater alacrity than they had previously displayed, the Greeks swung out and lowered the boat. Into her was handed a compass, mast and sail, in addition to the provisions. Each man was told that he might take with him what money he happened to possess, but about forty pounds in various currencies belonging to the owners Cain detained. He also refused permission for the ship's papers to be taken away by the captain.

"D'ye think we've hands enough to work the ship, sir?" asked Barnard. "Supposing we keep back that fellow; he speaks English of sorts."

Cain considered the suggestion. He was not at all prejudiced in favour of it. He never had a high opinion of the modern Greek, however much he admired the Greece of old, when it was a mighty empire that produced *men*. There arose in his mind the problem of what to do with the fellow on the termination of the voyage, wherever it might be. He might inform the authorities at the first port they made, since he was not implicated in the drink and arms-running business to the same extent as the cowardly Captain Georgeos Sepotos. On the other hand, he might—and probably would—be coerced into discreet silence. Four hands were, after all, few enough for the task of working the schooner.

"Very good," he replied. "Tell him to fall out, Mr. Barnard."

The Greek did so without the slightest hesitation. To him the bo'sun explained

that he would be required to assist in working the ship, and provided he gave no trouble, he would receive none, adding that if he carried out his duties well he would be paid considerably more than if he had remained on board under the orders of Captain Sepotos.

“And what’s your tally—your name?” concluded Barnard.

“Basil Zaros, sah,” replied the man. “Me all righta. Spik Englis’. Me been in Englis’ ship vourteen mont’s.”

As soon as Captain Sepotos went over the side the boat pushed off. The Greek skipper was feeling too dazed from the effects of the blow to openly display the state of his feelings; nor was Cain a man to crow over a beaten foe, however mean and despicable.

In less than an hour the boat, under sail, was out of sight, while the *Nike*, under her new masters, was bowling along towards the distant South American coast.

## CHAPTER V

### ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

It was a bold project taking the little craft across the wide Atlantic, but there were good prospects of the satisfactory realisation of Captain Cain's plans. For one thing, the *Nike* was a stoutly-built and weatherly craft, although lacking the efficient upkeep that is generally bestowed upon vessels flying the red ensign. With her reduced complement there was fresh water more than sufficient for the needs of the crew. The provisions, although of a nature that a British crew would jib at, were enough to last a month. There was little fear of the voyage being unduly protracted by calms, since there was a motor on board which might reasonably be expected to take the vessel along at a steady four knots; while it was a matter of a few hundred miles before the *Nike* picked up the favourable south-east Trades.

On the other side of the picture they were unquestionably short-handed. It meant long watches and the mustering of all hands whenever it became necessary to trim or take-in sail.

Almost the first thing Cain did, as soon as the boat was out of sight, was to stow the square topsails and send the yards down, thus virtually converting the vessel into a fore-and-aft schooner. That alone saved a considerable amount of labour in the subsequent management of the ship, although in light and favourable winds her speed would suffer in consequence.

"Better to jog along steadily than to risk losing your sticks over the side, Mr. Barnard," he observed. "I'm not keen on sending any one aloft on a dark night to take in topsails. And there's another thing; hanged if I like all that booze aboard. It may cause a racket when we get across to the other side. We'll start the lot."

"Not keep any, sir?" asked the bo'sun dubiously.

"No, not a drop," rejoined Cain. "This is going to be a long ship—a very long ship. The rifles? We'll hang on to them. We might strike some place where there's a revolution on. This is not at all an unlikely proposition. If so, they'll come in handy. Just before we left England, you may remember, there was a revolution in Paraquil del Norte. It might still be on. If it isn't, it's ten to one the counter-revolution is in full blast. Hang it all! I may yet become a second Cochrane, or another O'Higgins."

"Who might they be, sir?" inquired Barnard.

Cain explained.

"And you, Barnard, might rise to the rank of general in the Paraquil del Norte Republican Army," he added. "How would that suit?"

"It depends a lot on the dibs, sir," replied the bo'sun. "Wearing a cocked hat and gold lace isn't much of a catch unless there's plenty of rhino to go along with it."

"We'll get plenty, never fear," rejoined Cain confidentially. "Now pipe hands to dinner. After that we'll whip those casks out of the hold and ditch them."

It was not because Cain was a teetotal fanatic that he ordered the spirits to be thrown overboard. On the contrary, he was fond of a whisky-and-soda, but he was willing to deny himself that—even though the whisky was pretty inferior stuff of the fire-water brand—rather than risk the possible ill-effects of potent spirit as far as his men were concerned.

There was no open hesitation on the part of either Davidge or Cross at the curt order to "up-casks and overboard." They knew their skipper pretty well by this time, and were well content to abide by his judgment. Incidentally they realised that it was not well to trifle with the savage temper which Cain himself had often a severe struggle to keep under control.

Zaros, although he had good cause to fear the new skipper, cherished an idea that he might circumvent him by guile. During the task of throwing overboard the casks he contrived to secrete a bottle in his jumper and afterwards to transfer it to his locker.

For the next week all went well. The wind held fair and steady, enabling the *Nike* to reel off mile after mile with the regularity of clockwork. No inquisitive warship, sent in pursuit by an outraged Government, appeared in sight. It was safe to conclude, therefore, that the Greek ex-skipper of the *Nike* had deemed discretion the better part of valour and had preferred to utter futile maledictions upon the Englishmen who had got to wind'ard of him than to risk penal servitude at the price of revenge.

Zaros appeared to shape so well that Cain decided to let him take a trick at the helm without keeping him under constant supervision, and for five days following this innovation the Greek carried out his duties faithfully.

One evening Zaros stood the First Watch. At four bells Cain and Davidge were turned in; Barnard and Cross were standing by to take the Middle Watch. It was a bright moonlight night with a fairly calm sea. The *Nike*, close-hauled in the port-tack, was making about three and a half knots.

Suddenly a rasping sound was heard, followed by a shriek and a heavy splash. In a trice the bo'sun dashed on deck, followed by Cross. Even in the short time that elapsed between the noise and Barnard gaining the deck the schooner had run up into the wind with her fore-and-aft canvas shaking violently.

Bounding aft, the bo'sun gripped the wheel and put the helm hard-a-port.

Fortunately the schooner had not lost way, and being easy in her helm was now under control, but not before Cain and Davidge appeared from below.

“Man overboard!” roared Barnard.

“I see him!” announced Cross, pointing to a small dark object a couple of hundred yards on the *Nike*’s starboard quarter.

“Bout ship!” ordered Cain. “Stand by the head-sheets.”

“Helm’s a-lee, sir!”

The schooner went about without hesitation. Well it was that Cain had long before decided to dispense with the square topsails.

“I’ll take her,” said the pirate captain, placing his hand on the wheel. “Stand by, Mr. Barnard, to pick up the man. See that you’ve bowlines handy.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” replied the bo’sun, and went for’ard to carry out the skipper’s orders.

His worst enemy—and he had many—could not deny that Cain knew how to handle a craft whether under steam or sail. Gauging his distance to a nicety, he first bore away and then put the helm down gently until the *Nike* lost way with her fore-foot within an oar’s length of the man in the ditch.

Barnard heaved a bowline. The Greek clutched at it wildly.

“Slip it round you, you lubber!” roared the bo’sun.

Zaros made no attempt to carry out the instructions. Already the schooner was gathering sternway and tending to fall off the wind.

“Clap on, you!” exclaimed Barnard, throwing the slack of another line to Davidge and Cross. Then passing the loop round his waist the bo’sun leapt overboard, made a hitch round the still floundering Greek and shouted to the men to haul away roundly.

Thirty seconds later Barnard was contemplating the shivering, cowering figure of the man he had rescued as the Greek crouched on the deck.

“Drunk as a lord!” he muttered, and, grasping Zaros by the legs, hauled him aft without ceremony and dumped him at the feet of Captain Cain.

“Yes; I know,” remarked Cain calmly. “The poop reeks with spirit. Get him below and shove him in his bunk. I’ll deal with him in the morning.”

It was not until six bells in the Forenoon Watch that the wretched Greek had recovered from the debauch that had not only nearly cost him his life but had imperilled the safety of the ship.

With perfect fairness Cain had deferred judgment until Zaros was able to give a coherent explanation of his actions. There was evidence in plenty to prove that the man was hopelessly intoxicated. A broken bottle found at the foot of the binnacle

was produced, bearing a label that showed it had been pilfered from the hold.

The Greek admitted his guilt and begged for mercy.

"Mercy you have received," said Cain sternly. "Your life has been spared. You have to thank Mr. Barnard that you're not food for sharks. Now the sentence is this: for secreting liquor contrary to orders you will receive a dozen lashes. For being drunk on duty another dozen, and for neglect you will be awarded yet another dozen, with the understanding that if you give no further trouble until the end of the voyage they will be remitted. Trice him up, lads!"

The Greek, howling in anticipation, was secured by wrist and ankles to the belaying-pins round the mainmast. Then, armed with an unstranded piece of tarred rope, Barnard proceeded to execute the sentence.

At the twenty-fourth lash the Greek, too exhausted to continue his wild shrieks, was cast loose, water and vinegar was applied to the raw weals, and he was told to take to the hammock until further orders.

A week later the rugged coastline of the Republic of Paraquil del Norte hove in sight.

Now came a doubly anxious time. The *Nike*'s charts did not embrace the South American coast; the harbour of Bomanares, for which Cain was making, had an intricate entrance; and, moreover, the pirate captain was not at all sure of the welcome he would receive when he brought a schooner with a cargo of small arms into port.

As it was too late in the day to hope to gain the harbour before darkness set in, the *Nike* was hove-to, but with the first streaks of dawn she approached the land.

There was not a breath of wind to ruffle the placid surface of the sea. From shorewards came the dull rumble of heavy gunfire, while away to the nor'ard three or four vessels, having an appearance of warships, were steaming slowly as if they were conducting blockading operations.

"Hanged if I like the look of things!" said Cain to the bo'sun. "I wanted a revolution, but this is a bit too premature. Until we see how the land lies, we'd better go slow. I'll start up the motor."

He went below, taking Davidge with him. Although the man had had no experience of marine engines, whether internal combustion or otherwise, he could be relied upon to work the throttle and reverse gear.

As soon as Cain got the motor to start, and to be thoroughly warmed up, he went on deck, called out for "full ahead," and steadied the schooner on her course.

Nearer and nearer grew the entrance to the harbour. On the hills on the southern side field-guns were shelling the town, while the batteries protecting Bomanares

were as vigorously replying.

"Now we're here we'll carry on," decided Cain. "We haven't crossed the Atlantic to be scared stiff by a few seven-pounder shells. There's one blessing, those gunboats don't seem to be interfering with us."

A quarter of an hour later the warships were hidden in a faint haze, but Cain gave an exclamation of annoyance when he noticed a motor-launch flying a green, yellow and black ensign approaching straight for the *Nike*.

"What rag's that, sir?" asked Barnard, who had been studying the launch through a pair of powerful binoculars, late the property of Captain Georgeos Sepotos.

"The Republic of Ouro Preto," was the answer. "What Ouro Preto's doing in this concern beats me."

"She's chock-a-block with cocked hats an' gold lace, sir," reported the bo'sun.

Cain nodded. His aggressive jaw was thrust forward—a characteristic feature what he was faced with a tough proposition.

"They mean to board us," he declared. "It'll take more than a dozen gilded popinjays of a tenth-rate South American Republic to stop us going into Bomanares, Mr. Barnard. 'S'pose it's a natural curiosity since we show no colours. Pity there isn't a red ensign on board, but I'm hanged if I'll sail under Greek colours. Get Cross aft, Mr. Barnard. Place Zaros at the helm. You might bring a tin of petrol on deck, loosen the stopper and place it at the gangway. We may be able to part on amicable terms. If we don't, then I feel sorry for those gim-crack flatfeet in yonder launch."

A minute later Cain gave the order for the motor to be declutched. He was too wily to enter the limits of territorial waters. Evidently the Ouro Pretoan launch thought so too, for she slowed down and circled to starboard until such time as the schooner was imprudent enough to approach within the line of territorial waters.

"Enough of this fooling," muttered Cain angrily, and signalled to the launch to close.

There was some delay, during which a hurried consultation took place between the coffee-coloured officers in the stern-sheets. Then the launch gathered way, and finally ranged up alongside the *Nike*'s starboard quarter.

"What ship is this?" hailed a voice in Spanish. "Where are you bound?"

"Inglis!" replied Cain briefly.

"Ah! you Inglis den?" rejoined a voice in broken English. "Vy you no show colours?"

"Lost them in a gale of wind," said Cain mendaciously. "We're bound for

Bomanares with a general cargo."

"It is forbidden, señor capitán," declared the spokesman. "Der is guar—how you call it?—var——"

"War," prompted the pirate captain.

"Si, dat is so," agreed the other, purposely avoiding another attempt to pronounce the word that had proved such a stumbling-block. "It declared is by the Republics of Ouro Preto an' Banda Rica against the Republic of Paraquil del Norte."

"And who's winning so far?" asked Cain.

"Ouro Preto an' her ally, Banda Rica," declared the Spanish-speaking officer proudly.

"Then my money's on Paraquil," remarked Cain in an aside. "Who says we cannot enter the port?"

"By de authority of dis," replied the officer, brandishing a paper with an enormous seal. "It is de order, señor, dat you follow me to Olivenca for de examination. You suspect are. Señor, I regret, but you are under arrest."

## CHAPTER VI

### RUNNING THE BLOCKADE

At a word of command two men armed with rifles and sword-bayonets clambered awkwardly over the schooner's side. The English-speaking Ouro Pretoan followed, giving a curious glance at the meagre crew of the *Nike* as he did so.

As far as Captain Cain was concerned, it did not matter very much whether he offered his services to Ouro Preto or to her antagonist, Paraquil del Norte. It was the high-handed proceeding on the part of the representatives of the former Republic that "got his back up" and strengthened his resolution to throw in his lot with the weaker side. Of the matter in dispute he knew nothing and cared less. Adventure, with the prospect of a monetary reward, was his choice, and on the face of things he looked like getting the former, although just at present the pecuniary possibilities were none too rosy.

Already his quick wit was planning out a scheme for immediate action. He had not the slightest doubt but that he could get the upper hand of the bilious-looking warriors in the launch. It was the gunboats that had to be taken into consideration. Would it be possible, he asked himself, to overpower the boarding party and motor right into the harbour before the warships could be upon the scene? Had he still been in possession of the *Alerte* he would not have hesitated to engage the whole of the Ouro Preto flotilla; the pirate submarine's six-inch quick-firer would be more than a match for the gunboats' ill-served ordnance. But, he reflected, the *Nike* was not the *Alerte*.

He turned on his heel, strode away from the side and made as if to go to the wheel. The three Ouro Pretoan soldiers followed.

The moment they were hidden by the bulwark from their comrades in the launch, Cain swung round and levelled his automatic at the officer's head. Simultaneously Barnard and Cross covered the armed guard, while the Greek stepped up to each man and deprived him of his weapons.

It was all done in a few moments and without a word being spoken or a sound likely to arouse suspicion being made.

As soon as the Republicans were disarmed, Cain pointed significantly to the fo'c'sle hatchway. The men, still covered by the bo'sun, marched off without resistance.

Cain stepped to the side again and gave a quick glance at the launch alongside. Evidently her crew thought they had an easy task, for they were for the most part

sitting down and smoking enormous cigars. The launch had been made fast fore and aft, but the bowman had rejoined his companions in the large open cockpit.

Before the Republican soldiers knew what was happening, Cain heaved the open petrol can upon the fore-deck of the launch and flung a lighted box of matches previously dipped in petrol after it. In an instant the bow part of the boat was enveloped in flames that rose so high as to threaten the schooner with destruction. In fact, Cain realised that he had rather overdone matters.

Yelling in terror, the remaining Ouro Pretoans, dropping swords and rifles, made a frantic rush for the only sanctuary available—the deck of the *Nike*. There, covered by the automatics of Cross and the captain, they divided their attention between keeping their hands up and clapping them to various parts of their gilt-braided uniform to stifle smouldering cloth that for the most part smouldered only in their heated imagination.

With blows of an axe Cain severed the warps that held the launch alongside, rushed to the wheel and gave orders for “full ahead.” The *Nike* gathered way only just in time, for already her dry and lavishly-tarred bulwarks were burning—a calamity which Zaros, with commendable presence of mind, averted by means of buckets of water.

By the time the prisoners were safely under hatches the *Nike* was well inside the three-mile limit. There lay the harbour. Three miles on her starboard quarter appeared the light-grey hull of one of the hostile gunboats.

Her skipper was obviously puzzled. He was undecided whether to make for the still fiercely-burning launch and rescue possible survivors or to stand in pursuit of the schooner. In his indecision he shaped a course that would bring him approximately midway between the launch and the present position of the *Nike*.

A flash leapt from the gunboat’s bows and a projectile whizzing a good hundred yards from the schooner’s starboard bow knocked up a shower of spray a full quarter of a mile beyond her.

“You’ve got to do better than that, old son, if you want a coco-nut or a fat cigar,” exclaimed Cain.

Another shell followed. This time it fell short, ricochetted and passed a cable’s length astern.

The Englishmen cheered ironically. Zaros, at the first shot, had made himself scarce. After all, the fight was none of his seeking, but how he hoped to find protection from a high-explosive shell behind the two-inch planking of the schooner remained an unsolved problem.

If the Greek “had the wind up,” the prisoners were stricken by a perfect tornado

of blue funk. They shrieked, cursed, shouted and hammered frantically upon the strongly—secured hatch in their frenzied efforts to escape being pulverised by the shells of their compatriot or being drowned like rats in a trap.

“We’re more than holding her,” commented the bo’sun. “She’s not doing more than five knots, the old tin kettle.”

Cain nodded. He realised that Barnard’s estimate was over-sanguine, but even at the rate of the pursuing craft the *Nike* would be inside the harbour before her pursuer had a chance to overhaul her.

Shell after shell hurtled through the air, all hopelessly wide of the mark, until the crew of the schooner found the effort of raising cheers for the gunboat’s erratic aim was too monotonous. But when one missile whizzed fairly between fore and main masts and severed the triatic-stay, even Cain realised that a lot of damage might be done by another fluke.

Then, without warning, the motor stopped. That was a calamity that might have been expected owing to the wheezy state of the antiquated engine.

Shouting to Barnard to take the helm, Cain dived down the ladder leading to the motor-room, pushed Davidge aside and adjusted throttle and ignition. All to no purpose. The motor obstinately refused to function.

Finding his efforts unavailing, the pirate captain returned to the deck. In the circumstances he was in a helpless position. There was no wind. Even had there been, the gunboat would be alongside before the canvas could be set. The *Nike* was a mile from shore, and the pursuing craft now only a mile and a half astern.

“We’re all right, sir!” exclaimed the bo’sun, pointing overhead. “She’s hooking it!”

Looking skyward, Cain saw a large biplane passing overhead. In less than a minute she was over the gunboat, that had changed from pursuer to fugitive, and was plastering the water all around with bombs. From a destructive point of view these missiles were as harmless as the gunboat’s shells. The biplane was far too high for precision. Apparently her crew were reluctant to descend to effective bombing elevation, and showed as great a lack of initiative as their opponents had shown in their gunnery.

But the intervention had saved the *Nike*. By the time the biplane was on her way back from her ineffectual attempt to destroy the gunboat a steady on-shore breeze had sprung up.

Under foresail and headsails only the schooner was steered for the entrance of the harbour. Shells flew fairly close to her from the Banda Rican field-guns as she forged slowly ahead across the sheltered waters of the harbour, but after a while the

artillery duel was resumed between the rival Republican forces, and the *Nike* was allowed to bring up unmolested alongside a jetty.

As soon as the warps were secured, a party of Paraquilan officers, whose uniforms vied in colour and brilliancy with those of their opponents, came aboard.

"Are you the schooner we are expecting?" inquired one of them in excellent English.

"Rather—of course," replied Cain.

"From New York?"

"No, from Liverpool."

"But, señor capitán, I do not understand," rejoined the perplexed general. "We know of no English vessel expected here. We are awaiting a cargo of high explosives from New England."

"'Fraid we're not that," said Cain. "We've a nice cargo of small-arms and——"

"And what, señor capitán?"

"What do you do with the prisoners that fall into your hands?" asked Cain bluntly.

"Shoot them—as a general rule," was the reply, in tones that expressed surprise that such a question should require such a simple answer.

"Well, then," rejoined the pirate captain, "I've a nice little bunch of generals and privates in my fore-peak. I had hoped to make you a present of the whole crowd of them; but I won't. They are under the protection of the British flag, only unfortunately we haven't a British ensign on board. That's a bit of a nuisance, because I wanted to give you a hand with your little scrap. As it is, I must remain on board and keep an eye on my prisoners."

"And if I do not give you permission to depart: what then?"

"It would take a jolly sight better man than you to stop me," retorted Cain, his hitherto unruffled features developing a scowl that was generally a sign for an opponent to draw in his horns.

The general's demeanour underwent a quick change.

"It was but a jest, my friend," he replied in a conciliatory voice. "The prisoners, when you hand them over, will be given fair treatment. I swear it by the Virgin! . . . And now, concerning those rifles——"

"Come aboard!" urged Cain.

The rest of the conversation was of a purely commercial nature, involving a lot of unnecessary haggling, since the pirate captain refused to make any reduction of terms and the Paraquilan general was anxious to obtain the arms and munitions at almost any price.

In twenty minutes General Leon y Poseda, Minister of War for the Republic of Paraquil, went ashore.

"It's all right so far, Mr. Barnard," announced Cain, loud enough for the crew to overhear. "I've sold the goods for fifty thousand dollars. They're bringing the money down in an hour's time. Of that sum I'll stick to ten shares, you'll have five, Davidge and Cross two each and the Greek one."

"And how much is a share, sir?" asked the bo'sun anxiously. "I never was much of a hand at figures."

"Two thousand five hundred dollars, Mr. Barnard. Roughly, a Paraquil dollar is worth three shillings and sixpence."

"Then I reckon my fortune's made, sir."

"It's only a step in that direction, Mr. Barnard. You wait till we've carried out our plans. You'll be a millionaire in whatever part of South America you decide to settle down."

"I'd rather have a couple o' thousand quid and be able to settle down in England," rejoined the bo'sun, yearning for the homeland from which he had voluntarily exiled himself. "But say, sir, how are we going to get away with the coin? This one-hoss Republic's blockaded by land and sea, as far as I can make out."

"Precisely," agreed Cain; "but trust me to find a way out of that difficulty. Now, Mr. Barnard," he added briskly, "get the hands to work to clear hatches. We've got to deliver the goods before we handle the rhino, so look lively!"

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PROBLEM

By this time firing had ceased on both sides. The war between Paraquil and the allied Republics of Ouro Preto and Banda Rica was being waged in a desultory fashion. Bloodthirsty in sentiment, the rival armies showed no great desire to engage in a pitched battle. The Paraquil Navy, consisting of three old armed river steamers, had sought refuge in Bomanares Harbour, after declining an engagement with the numerically superior but antiquated gunboats of Ouro Preto. Already Paraquil was invested by land and sea, and only the necessity of having to coal had temporarily caused the withdrawal of the gunboats, thereby enabling the *Nike* to run the blockade. Every morning the artillery duel took place between the opposing forces, until having exhausted their respective quotas of ammunition the guns remained silent until the following day. Generally speaking, very little damage had been done owing to the defective nature of the shells and the inefficiency of the artillery-men. Whenever a clash did occur, and prisoners were made, the latter were afterwards shot in batches.

Cain was determined to obtain guarantees for the safety of his captives. Although General Leon y Poseda had sworn to spare their lives, the pirate captain regarded the man with distrust. For one thing, had the General authority, in the name of the President of Paraquil, to accede to Cain's demands? That he would have to find out. Meanwhile the captive officers and men would be kept on board the *Nike*.

So far the pirates had done remarkably well from a monetary point of view. Davidge and Cross could hardly realise their good fortune, and were already planning how, when and where they could go ashore and spend some of their newly-acquired wealth. Zaros, too, was almost beside himself with joy. He never expected to share in the plunder, and, coupled with the fact that the third dozen lashes had been remitted, he was ready to do anything for his new skipper, who was, he decided, a thousand times better than the crafty Captain Georgeos Sepotos.

As soon as the hatches were removed and the tackle rove for getting out the bulky cases of arms and ammunition, Cain ordered the men to knock off and held a council of war. He pointed out the possibilities of adventure and profit by taking an active part in the present war.

"Englishmen and Irishmen have gained honour, riches and renown in wars between various South American Republics," he told them. "Similar opportunities await you. You might even have your portraits on the postage-stamps of Paraquil

and go down to posterity as national heroes! It is a sound proposition, lads, and take it from me a thundering good chance to coin money if we go the right way to work. I've already sounded that gold-braided blighter who was on board just now, and he's bringing the Admiral of the Paraquilan Navy down to have a yarn. I haven't seen their navy yet, and don't expect it's up to much; but there's no reason why we should accept billets afloat if there are more attractive ones ashore. Hello! Here they come!"

The crowd of curious sightseers, comprising soldiers, negroes, mulattoes and Indians, women of varying degrees of colour and a swarm of, for the most part, almost naked children, had lined the quayside ever since the *Nike* entered the harbour. They parted, leaving a narrow lane through which the Republican officers made their way.

At the head of the party shuffled a stoutly-built individual with features so frequently encountered amongst South Americans of Semitic-Spanish descent—full, red lips, dark brown eyes and a mop of crisp curly hair. His head, instead of being erect upon his shoulders, appeared to be permanently jutting forward, so that his chin was lower than his hunched torso. There was a shifty, furtive look about his eyes, for which perhaps there was good reason, for he was Presidente Lippo Bramo, whose life had been attempted six times during the three months following his election as head of the Republic of Paraquil.

One step behind and slightly to the President's left stalked Cain's former visitor, General Leon y Poseda; while at a similar distance on the left was another of the "comic stunt-merchants" (as Cain contemptuously called them) of the Republic.

This was Almirante Mondez Gimletto, head of the decrepit collection of coffin-ships that comprised the Paraquilan Navy. He was slightly above middle height, with heavy, flabby features, on which sat a peculiarly irritating grin. His lips were full, the upper one overhanging the lower, while his receding chin and parrot-like beak gave the casual observer the impression that Nature had been careless in the proportions, and had slapped on to Mondez Gimletto's nose flesh and bone that might with advantage have gone to build up a decent chin.

On his head was perched a yachting cap, beneath which the well-oiled hair descended to such an extent as to suggest that months must have elapsed since last he was attended by a hairdresser. His "naval" uniform consisted of a double-breasted blue cloth coat with gilt buttons, to the cuff-sleeves of which had been sewn the shoulder-straps from a British Flag Officer's full-dress uniform. Grey flannel trousers tucked into high rubber boots completed this remarkable "get-up." For weapons he sported a cavalryman's sabre and a huge revolver in a holster strapper

and a waistbelt.

"If that," soliloquised Cain scornfully, "if that is the blighter who expects to give me orders, the Paraquil Navy is a 'wash-out' as far as I'm concerned. Faugh! That sickly smile reminds me too much of that swab Pengelly. That merchant reminds me of a certain type of amateur yachtsman at home—the display of so-called uniform is in inverse ratio to their knowledge of the sea. No! No Paraquil Navy stunts for me!"

In the wake of the star trio trailed lesser luminaries of the troupe, attended by soldiers of the President's guard—coffee-coloured, knock-kneed specimens, clad in scarlet coats, dirty white trousers and kepis and armed with antiquated breech-loaders and long triangular bayonets. Almost without exception the guard were barefooted.

Following the guard came mules laden with strong-boxes and escorted by more troops whose uniforms consisted principally of broad-brimmed, high-crowned hats, cotton shirts and trousers, and armed with machetes, revolvers and rifles of various patterns.

The President, General Poseda and Almirante Gimletto boarded the *Nike* and were duly received by Captain Cain, who was too astute a man to betray the desire to "choke off" his distinguished guests, since there was a possibility of putting them to good use.

With Poseda as interpreter, a lively conversation was maintained between Captain Cain and his garlic-scented visitors, during which Barnard was methodically opening the strong-boxes and examining the contents.

"Bit clipped, some of that boodle, sir," he announced. "But they're dollars, right enough; not chucks of lead same as a Chink tried to do it on me out in Shanghai."

The coin having been counted and stowed away aft, a gang of negroes set to work to clear the hold of the cargo and ammunition, but not before Cain had considerably startled the ebony-featured mob by making them throw away the almost inevitable cigar that each man was smoking.

"Ver' good!" exclaimed General Poseda admiringly. "You know how to order men. I do not think they would obey me in that."

"If I don't know how to handle men no one does," rejoined Cain grimly. "If you've no objection to be blown sky-high through some careless blighter dropping a lighted cigar on a defective keg of cordite, I have!"

The General nodded, and, turning to Almirante Mondez, Gimletto engaged in rapid conversation.

"My friend here," he said, switching back to Captain Cain and indicating the inanely-grinning head of the Paraquian Navy—"my friend here is desirous to know

whether you would accept a post as capitán of one of our warships. It would also be possible to offer commissions to these gentlemen," indicating Barnard and the three hands.

"The Almirante is very kind," replied Cain, "but the matter requires consideration. I must place your proposition before my companions, although no doubt they, even as I, would be ready to devote their experiences and venture their lives for the well-being of the Republic, subject, of course, to suitable remuneration. But that reminds me, General. I'm rather anxious to have that money I've just received handed over to my agents, the firm of Señor Paquita of Copiapo, Chile. As you will realise, if my services are required it would not do to leave thousands of dollars aboard the schooner."

General Leon y Poseda nodded sympathetically. A similar problem had been worrying him for a considerable time. As General of the Republican Army he had well feathered his own nest, but there was little sense in doing that if the blockading force were victorious. He might escape with his life, but he could not take his ill-gotten hoard with him. He had contemplated putting his riches on board the best of the ill-conditioned vessels comprising the Republican Navy and attempting to run the blockade.

A similar idea had occurred to Captain Cain. To carry it out he would be willing to accept service of a very temporary nature under Almirante Mondez Gimletto; he would be ready to risk long odds in an encounter with the fleets of the allied enemy —until he realised that there was a hundred-to-one chance against him. He doubted whether the old tub could maintain a speed of five knots for four consecutive hours; and, doubting, abandoned the idea.

Presently General Poseda pointed towards the mouth of the harbour. Cain looked in the same direction, but could see nothing worthy of note.

"Keep on looking," said the general. "Pretend we are discussing the defences in case the Almirante is suspicious. We are supposed to be friends, but Madre di Dios!" A shrug of the shoulders expressed volumes of thought concerning Poseda's opinion of Mondez Gimletto. "I have a plan to our mutual advantage. Arrange to call at my quarters, in the Calle Olivier, at eight to-night, and we will go further into the matter."

Cain assented. Here was another possible chance of spoiling the Egyptian to his own advantage; and that, after all was said and done, was what he came to Paraquil for.

When the President and his staff had taken their departure and the last case of small-arms had been removed to the arsenal, Cain broached the subject of entering

into the service of the Republican Navy. He did not put the proposition in an attractive light, and he was not at all surprised when the bo'sun "turned it down." Davidge and Cross were of the same opinion. They didn't mind fighting with the prospect of adding to their newly-acquired riches; but they drew the line at sacrificing themselves to the guns of a numerically superior and far more formidably-armed foe, the promised guerdon of commissioned rank in its Republican Navy notwithstanding.

Then, to the surprise of the rest, Basil Zaros lifted up his voice. The idea, he explained, appealed to him. The prospect of strutting about on the quarter-deck of an ex-Hudson River passenger steamer, and to be rigged out in gold lace with a cocked hat and a sword, touched his vanity, although he had already promised himself that no vessel under his command would leave Bomanares Harbour while the enemy warships cruised about outside. Then, at the end of the war, he could return to his native country and buy a farm on the slopes of Mount Hymettus, and thus fulfil the dream of his life.

"Quite a good scheme," remarked Cain, who realised that this was an easy way out of the difficulty of how to rid himself of the presence of the oily little Greek. "I'll see that Almirante is informed of your decision as soon as possible."

A fair division of the dollars followed the breaking up of the meeting. Cain, who would have rooked without compunction any one whom he had occasion to distrust, was absolutely straight in his dealings with his subordinates who had so loyally stood by him when fortune had temporarily deserted him.

To them he broached the subject of how to get the money away into safe keeping. He mentioned Copiapo, pointing out that Chile was on the other side of the South American continent.

"Haven't these chaps an aeroplane, sir?" suggested the bo'sun. "Couldn't we get the general to run the boodle out of the country?"

"And let the airmen rook us, eh?" rejoined Cain. "I wouldn't trust a Paraquilan with half a dollar of mine, let alone fifty thousand."

Nevertheless, Barnard's remark caused Captain Cain furiously to think.

## CHAPTER VIII

### GENERAL POSEDA'S SCHEMES

Late in the afternoon the prisoners taken from the Ouro Preto blockade-launch were removed from the *Nike's* fore-peak and handed over to the armed guard from the citadel of Bomanares.

In spite of General Leon y Poseda's assurances that they would be treated as prisoners of war, the attitude of the crowd of spectators on the quay did not convince Cain of the general's ability to carry out his pledge. Even the troops sent to escort the captives preserved an air of detachment as if they wouldn't mind in the least if the rabble saved them the trouble of performing what appeared to them to be a totally unnecessary routine. Why bother to have to look after and feed a few Ouro Pretoan enemies when the matter could be easily and spectacularly settled by lining them up against a blank wall and expending a few rounds of ammunition?

"Wot do yon niggers mean by yellin' out 'more tay,' Jim?" inquired Davidge of his pal Cross.

"Don't yer know?" was the rejoinder. "It's a way they've got in these parts; when they don't like a bloke they give 'im 'more tea.' That usually polishes 'im off proper-like. Hullo, wot's our skipper up to?"

Cain had taken in the situation at a glance. He felt himself morally responsible for the safety of the men who had fallen victims to his daring.

"Carry on here, Mr. Barnard!" he exclaimed, and beckoning to Davidge and Cross he leapt from the schooner's bulwarks down to the quay, forced his way through the mob and planted himself in front of the irresolute guards.

He gave three commands in English. On the parade ground at Whale Island hundreds of superbly disciplined blue-jackets had suffered themselves to be manoeuvred with the ease of a well-oiled machine at the sound of that far-reaching imperious voice.

There was no mistaking the significance or the vehemence of the Englishman's orders to the ill-assorted squad of Paraquilan guards. They literally "jumped to it," bringing their rifle butts down with such vigour and irregularity that Cain had all his work cut out to refrain from the curt, scathing command, "As you were!"

The mob of half-castes and negroes gave back a few yards, then urged on by a gigantic mulatto they bore down upon the escort; even grasped the rifles and tried to wrench them from the again wavering soldiers.

Cain had his automatic. It remained in his pocket. Without another word he took

two paces forward and kicked. Long experience had taught him how to handle white men; it had also taught him the futility of using his fist against the armour-plated skull of a nigger. He knew that the best way to deal promptly and effectively with a “son of Ham” was to tackle him in a weak spot—his shins.

The mulatto dropped, screaming with agony. In a twinkling of an eye Cain followed up his advantage. Gripping the terrified wretch by the arms he hurled him into the press. Half a dozen of the mob went down before the human missile; the rest took to their heels.

Again Cain faced the escort.

“Party—’shun! . . . By the right! . . . Quick—march!”

They stepped out—smartly, taking into consideration what they were. Cain marched by the side of the incompetent captain whose lax authority he had superseded, while Davidge and Cross took up a position behind the rear rank, enjoining the considerably astonished men to ‘Pick it up, there! Right, left; right, left!’

Secure from further molestation, the prisoners were escorted to their quarters, where Cain, having satisfied himself that the governor of the citadel knew his orders, left them, but not before they had expressed their gratitude to the man to whom they owed their plight.

Accompanied by his two men, Cain strode back to the schooner, contemptuously ignoring the scowls that were directed towards him by the scum of the town, although he was quite aware that many of them would have thrust a knife between his shoulder-blades—if they dared.

Already Cain had gathered a fairly comprehensive and impartial idea of the state of the unhappy country in which he found himself. It was, he decided, not the fault of the people, but of the rulers, that the Republic of Paraquil del Norte had come perilously close to a cropper. That the place had possibilities he had no doubt. It was mainly an agricultural and grazing country, with a fair amount of mineral wealth. The climate, although hot, was not so enervating as that of several South American States that had “made good” during the last fifty years. The people, apart from the peons, seemed to be inclined to be industrious and law-abiding; but to what purpose, Cain asked himself, when they were governed by such absolute misfits as President Lippo Bramo.

It was solely owing to the latter’s ignorance and vaingloriousness that Paraquil del Norte found herself at daggers-drawn with the Republics that bounded her territory north, south and west. Both Banda Rica and Ouro Preto were striving to be progressive in face of the usual difficulties with which young Republics have to

contend. They had made overtures to President Bramo for the formation of a Confederate State in order that the territory might be developed and trade fostered under mutual and expansive terms.

President Bramo would have none of it. What he wanted was military power—to be a sort of Napoleon at whose slightest whim both Banda Rica and Ouro Preto would tremble. In his dictatorial manner he forced his country into war, firmly convinced that he could fall upon and crush Banda Rica before her ally was ready and then proceed to effect the conquest of Ouro Preto.

Unfortunately he forgot one thing; he lacked the support of the people over whom he had been placed in power by a “graft” election. His army, never very enthusiastic, was beaten almost at the outset in a battle that could only be described as a series of manœuvres between two opposing forces at long range. From that moment President Bramo was on the defensive, his troops giving way before the double invasion of the aggressive Republics. His generals, showing far more concern for their personal safety and for the opportunity afforded in the amassing of ill-gotten wealth than for the defence of the country, were already plotting to overthrow the dictator and to secure favourable terms with the invaders in so far as it affected them. Of what happened to Paraquil del Norte they knew little and cared less.

To Captain Cain, with his iron nerve, unquestionable courage and indomitable resolution, the problem was an enthralling one.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed, “isn’t this an opportunity for a MAN! To put the hostile Republics in their place, to straighten out internal complications, to set up a high standard of law and order, was not an impossible task even to one who had been, and still was as far as he knew, a proscribed pirate.”

Yet it was a hard task. To sweep aside the rotten system that was responsible for the internal disorders, to remodel the fighting forces, to secure permanent peace, both within and without, was truly an Augean task. And what then? Suppose he attempted and succeeded? Would all his efforts be in vain by reason of his inglorious past?

By the time he returned to the *Nike* he had thrashed out the question pretty thoroughly, decided to go slow for the present, and see how the land lay. Meanwhile another matter required immediate attention—that of the problem of how the fifty thousand silver dollars was to be removed from the threatened city to a place of safety.

It was nearly sunset when he went ashore again, this time to visit General Leon y Poseda. Judging by the aspect of Bomanares, there was little to suggest that “there was a war on.” Hostilities by mutual consent ceased at midday. There were troops

stationed in the outlying posts and in the sandbagged trenches, but not a rifle shot disturbed the stillness of the evening. In the plaza the tinkle of mandolines and guitars and the chatter of mantilla-wearing women and sombreroed men testified to the non-eradicable customs and traditions of Old Spain. The air was filled with the aroma of good cigars. Food might be scarce, but what mattered if the soothing properties of the fragrant weed were not to be denied to the easy-going populace of Bomanares?

Cain had little difficulty in finding the general's house. Under the portico stood two soldiers—negroes with flat chests, protruding paunches and permanently bent knees. Both were smoking the inevitable cigar. Their rifles, with fixed bayonets, reclined against the wall.

At the sight of the Englishman they grabbed their rifles and stood awkwardly to the salute—one with his *kepi* over his nose, the other with his headgear on the back of his woolly skull. Having rendered the perfunctory tribute, one of the men prodded a gong with the butt-end of his rifle, and in answer to the summons a white-haired mulatto in a scarlet coat appeared and signed to the visitor to enter.

"Welcome, Captain——" exclaimed General Poseda, pausing interrogatively. "I have not yet learn your name."

Without hesitation Cain replied. He had been expecting this. Obviously he could not announce himself as the supposed defunct Captain Cain of the pirate submarine *Alerete*, for it was reasonable to suppose that the news of his former exploits had already reached this South American port. Equally unwise would it be to give the name of Treverrick under which he had in partnership with Paul Pengelly run the ill-starred ship-breaking yard at Polkyl. There was such a thing as an extradition warrant for fraudulent directors, he remembered. Still more emphatic were the reasons why he should not reveal himself under his true name when not so very long ago he held a commission in his Britannic Majesty's Royal Navy.

"Trevor is my name, General," he replied, using the first two syllables of one of his *noms-de-guerre*, "Aubrey Trevor."

"English naval officer, of course?" suggested his questioner.

"During the Great War—yes," was the reply. "But, General, it is not with the past that we are concerned but the present—and future."

Poseda bowed. Whatever his character might be, he was not deficient in true Castilian politeness.

"Exactly," he agreed. "Pray take a chair. A cigar? A glass of real Scotch whisky?"

Cain accepted the cigar but declined the spirit. He was one of that type of men who cannot "carry a lot" with impunity, although he was partial to Hieland dew. And

now he had to make good use of a clear brain; besides, he decided, he didn't want Barnard and the hands to think that he had been drinking when he had denied them any indulgence in intoxicants.

The general opened negotiations in the usual Paraquilan fashion, namely, by elaborate and prolonged preliminaries before coming to the point. Cain let him wander, although it went against the grain to have to listen to a long and totally unnecessary preamble, realising that perhaps in a ton of chaff he might pick out a grain of wisdom.

"As I mentioned at our last meeting, Capitan Trevor," resumed Poseda, "it is the difficult matter concerning the removal of certain money from this city. Do you know anything about the management of airships?"

Cain controlled his surprise. He had not the faintest idea that the Paraquilan Republic possessed any air-fleet beyond a couple of antiquated biplanes. To a man the greater part of whose life had been spent in navigating all kinds of surface and submarine craft often without any knowledge of their distinctive peculiarities, the problem of having to deal with a lighter-than-air vessel ought not to present unsurmountable difficulties.

"Of course," he replied, which was literally true; although he had never been in the air he had seen Blimps landing, manœuvring and returning to their bases.

"Excellent!" exclaimed Poseda. "There is an airship available. We bought it from the Brazilian Government a few months ago. They had acquired it from the United States. We have plenty of petrol, but, most unfortunately, very little hydrogen, sufficient only to take the ship a distance of a thousand of your English miles—perhaps less."

"Hardly enough to make Copiapo," remarked his listener.

Poseda elevated his bushy eyebrows.

"Why Copiapo?" he asked.

"I have already explained why," rejoined Cain.

"For your benefit—not mine."

"For yours and mine," said the pirate firmly. "I'll undertake the voyage. Have you any trained airmen available?"

"Two," was the reply. "One is a compatriot of yours—the pilot of the biplane that came to the rescue of your schooner."

This was more news. Cain wondered who he might be, and whether he had ever come across the fellow in happier times. He hoped not. Nor did he feel inclined to take kindly to the man. In his opinion he lacked the dash that characterises the British airman, or else why did he hesitate to plane down and bomb the Ouro

Pretoan gunboat at effective altitude instead of hovering absurdly high over his objective?

"What is the English airman's name, General?" he inquired.

"Kayburn—at least that is the name he gave," replied Poseda, with a scarcely-concealed sneer. "It matters little to us—the name."

"Naturally," agreed Cain dryly. "I thought, perhaps, that I might have met him. I don't think I have."

"Then that pleasure is still in store for you," added the general. "And now, Capitan Trevor, I think we might arrange details. To-morrow you will be appointed a full colonel in the air-fleet of Paraquil del Norte——"

"And my men?"

"Will take service under you. I presume that will be agreeable? To-morrow, then, I will take you out by motor to see the airship, unless you object to being under shell-fire?"

"I'd rather be under shell-fire than under your orders, you swab," thought Cain, as he settled down to hear the general's plans to get away with his ill-gotten wealth.

## CHAPTER IX

### PENGELLY ESCAPES

The grey mists that throughout the morning had been lurking in the narrow, rocky valleys with which the dreary plateau of Dartmoor is intersected began slowly and unobtrusively to creep towards the quarries and the gaunt stone prison buildings of Princetown.

Almost the first intimation of the dreaded fog by the alert warders was the signal given from the prison for the gangs to reassemble and to be marched back to their gloomy quarters—a signal that adds tremendously to the burden of responsibility thrown upon the broad shoulders of the armed custodians of the convict-parties.

“Knock off, there, and fall in!” was the stern command to a group of grotesquely-garbed, close-cropped prisoners engaged in loading up huge slabs of dressed granite on a number of trollies by means of a crane.

One of the convicts addressed straightened his back and sniffed appreciatively at the moist air. To him it smelt reminiscently of the sea, bringing back memories of the seemingly distant days when he trod the planks of a ship—a free man.

He was short of stature, being about five feet seven in height, but broad of chest and shoulder. He had sallow features and a close crop of snow-white hair that once, not so very long ago, was raven-hued and curly. His face was burnt to a deep bronze colour and creased with innumerable wrinkles. His hands were broad, with stumpy fingers covered both with partly healed and open cuts as a result of his enforced labour at the quarries. Although, according to the prison records, his age was given as thirty-four he looked ten years older. His name—which he had dropped in order to answer to No. 123—was, according to the same authority, Paul Pengelly, and his sentence, on conviction on a charge of piracy on the high seas, was penal servitude for life.

Grumbly No. 123 fell in with the rest of his companions in crime. He was not in a pleasant state of mind. Apart from the constant resentment of having to look forward to over twenty years of unremunerative forced labour, he had been “ticked off” twice that morning by a stern-faced warder; while to end a far from perfect day the advent of the fog had curtailed the only privilege he valued—that of being in the open air—and had threatened to substitute the four grim walls of his dreary cell.

The gang marched off. Already the warders at the head of the woebegone procession were invisible from No. 123’s place in the column. Armed warders on either side gripped their rifles tighter and cast keen, alert glances at their charges.

They had no desire to have to engage in a manhunt, often finding themselves belt-deep in mud and water, amongst the bogs and hills of Dartmoor.

Suddenly a dull rumble reached the ears of the party—a rumble that steadily increased in volume. A convict belonging to another gang had, probably through sheer devilment or possibly by accident, released the shoes that “scotched” the wheels of a number of granite-laden trucks. Gathering momentum every instant the trucks were tearing down the incline in the wake of the gang.

“Right incline, there!” shouted the warder in charge of the party. “Look lively there!”

The convicts executed the manœuvre quickly enough, although not with a precision that would have won admiration from a regimental sergeant-major. The now irregular column halted, the men, interested at even such a common occurrence, turning their lean faces in the direction of the now rapidly approaching line of trucks, which, distorted grotesquely by the fog, looked like a row of gigantic pantechnicons.

Without warning, and possibly acting upon a sudden and unpremeditated impulse, two of the convicts broke away and with hunched backs and lowered heads made a dash for the boulder-strewn ground.

“Halt!” shouted an authoritative voice.

Already the two men were almost swallowed up by the pall of white fog.

“Fire!” ordered the same level tones.

Three rifles cracked as one, sending spurts of yellow flame stabbing the watery, clammy vapour. Followed a hideous, blood-curdling yell.

“That’s settled one of ‘em!” declared the warder in charge coolly. “See who it is, Johnson.”

The warder addressed threw his rifle on the crook of his arm and strode in the direction from whence the cry of pain had come. He searched amongst the gorse, found unmistakable tracks of the fugitives in the moisture-laden grass, but the convicts had got away. There was no sign of blood.

“Old trick,” muttered the warder angrily. “Made out he was scuppered. Well, it’s worked so far, confound it!”

By this time whistles were being blown in all directions. Additional warders, alarmed by the noise of the firing, came stumbling through the fog along the road from the prison to take up the pursuit. Once again the close column of convicts got moving until they entered the gloomy portals of the prison.

The muster-roll soon made it clear that three men were missing: Nos. 72, 81 and 123.

To Pengelly the whole business seemed a sort of confused dream. He had long

ago made up his mind to seize the first opportunity that offered to attempt his escape. There is far more inducement for a life-sentence man to try and break bounds than one serving a shorter term of imprisonment. The latter realises the folly of losing his "remission" in the event of his being captured. The former, with perhaps fifteen or twenty years of imprisonment ahead of him, does not value the privilege of having part of his sentence reduced for good conduct.

But No. 123 was quite unprepared for what was about to take place, and possibly on that account fortune favoured him. At any rate, he was a spectator of the flight of two of his gangmates, saw the flashes and heard the reports of the warders' rifles, and the rapt attention that gripped his companions in crime.

Even then he hardly knew what he was doing. A sudden, erratic impulse seized him. Steadily and softly he stepped back a couple of paces, realised that every one, warders and prisoners both, were intently looking in the direction the two fugitives had taken, turned and glided like an eel into the mist.

He felt no elation at this stage of the proceedings; elation would follow the realisation of his efforts. At present he hardly realised that for a few moments at least he was a free man—free to breathe, to move, to see, to listen with these senses unhampered by the presence of those human personifications of the Law—the grim-visaged warders.

Of the five senses one was yet denied him—that of sound. Utter silence was imperative as far as he was concerned. He crept cautiously from boulder to boulder, listening to the clamour in which he dared not participate. The gruff shouts of the convicts who, heedless of the wrath of their warders, yelled encouragement to their companions who had made a bid for freedom.

Through the fog came, too, the echoing blasts of the searchers' whistles, their anxious inquiries of one another as they temporarily lost touch in that baffling mist. More than once, deceived by the acoustic properties of that heavily vapour-charged atmosphere, Pengelly felt certain that the hunters were coming his way.

He bent his head and ran like a hound.

Sound in wind and limb, the escaped convict held on more or less blindly. He could hardly see a couple of yards ahead of him, but with the innate sense of direction possessed by those who go down to the sea in ships, he did not make the fatal error of running round in a vast circle. He noted the direction of the light wind. As long as he kept the breeze playing on the back of his left ear he knew he was pursuing a northerly direction. Fainter and fainter grew the noises of his or some one else's trackers: he had shaken off the hunters.

Yet the man was not content to sit down and rest. The situation was gradually

dawning upon him in all its significance. He was free of the dread prison, alone on the wild, trackless, morass-dotted moor; without money, without friends, without shelter save that afforded by Nature, without clothes other than the hideous garments liberally stamped with that odious device, the Broad Arrow.

As he made his way, with every sense on the alert, he began to formulate a plan of action. Not that he was likely to stick to it; his vacillating nature—which had to a great extent been responsible for the numerous failures of his career—was too deep set to be uprooted, but in the back of his mind it occurred to him that some sort of programme was necessary.

He was crafty enough to avoid the pitfall into which so many escaping prisoners have fallen—to make in the direction of his home. 'Twixt Lizard and Land's End, where almost every yard of the coast and the plateau bounded by it was familiar ground, there were snug and secure hiding-places in hundreds. The temptation to attempt to reach the western part of the Delectable Duchy was great, but he knew the risks to which he would be exposed if he dared to travel in that direction. Thanks to the telegraph, and still more so to wireless broadcasting, thousands of Devon and Cornish folk would be keeping their eyes open for a stranger slinking westward in the darkness of the night.

The two men whose attempt had prompted him to essay his dash for freedom had gone in the direction of the setting sun. That was an additional reason why he should not do so. He would keep going north—north because that was not the way either to his home or to that most secure lair of the escaped criminal, the Metropolis.

He held on, alternately running about fifty yards, halting to detect the possibility of hearing suspicious sounds, and then walking another fifty yards, thus maintaining a pace of close on six miles an hour. Avoiding the gradient that he knew would lead to the summits of the tors, steering clear of the valleys, he covered mile after mile. It was a triumph of cunning over instinct. Instinct prompts a man uncertain of his surroundings to make for the high ground; it was also a strenuous struggle against the pangs of hunger. In the valleys there would be homesteads, but homesteads meant vigilant owners and keen-scented watch-dogs. It was a thousand-to-one chance against the probability of enlisting the sympathies of any of the inhabitants of Dartmoor. They might give him food; they might not. In any case, they would be certain to give information of the convict's presence.

More than once he plunged boldly into a swift-running mountain torrent, realising that if bloodhounds were to be employed in following his track the scent would be destroyed by walking through water. Again and again he was compelled to make detours to avoid bogs—pits for the unwary, but to him clearly indicated by the

difference in colour and variety of the grass.

Almost unconsciously he had crossed the rough road that cuts the Moor from Ashburton to Tavistock. Great Mis Tor he passed on his left, the frowning heights unseen in the dank fog. Ahead lay a vast track of upland—barren, almost uninhabited and covered with rugged boulders, culminating in a bleak plateau whence rivers of Devon rise to flow in diametrically opposite directions to the English and the Bristol Channels. Beyond that the smiling fields of Devon, with villages and farms at almost every mile. Then his vigilance would have to be redoubled, but cross it he must if he were to gain the sea in the neighbourhood of Barnstaple Bay.

Then given an opportunity to steal a boat he, Pengelly, seafarer almost all his life and one-time second in command of the pirate submarine *Alerte*, would be on his natural element. It ought to be an easy matter to hail an outward-bound trader, pitch a yarn and find himself once more “bound foreign.”

But he was not there yet. The distant rumble of a train warned him that he was on the northern edge of “Dartymoor” and not far from the town of Okehampton. It was now getting dusk.

Cautiously Pengelly descended the steep incline and approached the railway. The fog showed signs of lifting. Already, in spite of the waning light, objects were discernible at a distance of about twenty or thirty yards. The threatened dispersal of the mist brought slight consolation to the man. Fog at sea he loathed like any other seaman. That meant a risk of collision or of piling one’s craft upon an invisible ledge of rocks. Here on Dartmoor he regarded the blinding mist as a direct gift of Nature to one of her badly-used children.

He found himself confronted by a hedge; hailed it as a harbinger of good fortune. It was the first hedge he had seen since he first entered the gloomy portals of the great convict prison, and the sight of it even in its restricted aspect was a pleasing one after the rough stone walls that encompass the sparse grazing lands of Dartmoor.

Beyond was a field of turnips. With more recklessness than he had hitherto displayed, Pengelly threw himself upon the raw vegetables, gnawing ravenously at the pithy roots. Then armed with some of the spoil for future consumption he plunged under the railway by means of a narrow culvert and found himself in a patch of gorse-covered ground with a high road only a few yards beyond—and a fairly frequented thoroughfare it was, judging by the hooting of horns by cautious motorists as they felt their way along the road.

Pengelly stopped short in his tracks and reasoned the position with himself. It was unlikely, he argued, that his pursuers would think that he had secreted himself so

close to a made road, and with a railway only a few yards away. The ground looked as if it were rarely used, if at all. Except for fuel, there was nothing of value to be got out of that gorse-covered strip of land.

Already he had covered fifteen miles of difficult country, he estimated, perhaps more, taking into consideration the enforced detours. He was feeling tired in spite of his wiry frame and muscular limbs. It would be fairly safe to snatch a few hours' sleep and resume his flight in the very early morning.

Crawling into a cavity formed by the gnarled roots of a clump of gorse, Pengelly tried to fall asleep. Notwithstanding his bodily fatigue he could not, although he closed his eyes and stretched his limbs in sheer exhaustion.

He found himself thinking—thinking, not of the present, but of the future; what he would do when permanent freedom was assured. Money was the first of many of the ideas that resolved themselves in his mind. There was plenty of it to be had; he knew where he could lay hands on it if he dared. At old Silas Porthoustoc's cottage, for instance, where a goodly portion of the *Alerte*'s ill-gotten plunder had been secreted by the old Cornish smuggler. Well, Silas had lost the number of his mess: Pengelly knew that. As far as he knew, the stuff was still in the case behind the old man's kitchen. But to go to Mousehole, where he was well known, and to attempt to recover the tempting prize, was out of the question.

Then there was the money Cain had sent out to South America to be deposited in the joint names of Treverrick and Pengelly at Saldanha's at Bahia. Well, Cain was out of it, rotting in the shattered hull of the *Alerte* on the bed of a West African lagoon, and Bahia was not an ungetatable port. Scores of vessels left the Bristol Channel for Bahia in the course of a year. Then cropped up the disconcerting question: how could he, Pengelly, a convicted pirate, supposed to be serving a life sentence, hope to establish his claim?

Remained a third source of possible wealth: the loot from the *Bronx City*, the Yankee ship the *Alerte* had captured a few days only before her destruction. That ought to be where he had buried it on the banks of the Faltuba River, and with no one to dispute his presence there. He recalled the trail. None of the crew of the *Alerte* had given away the secret, or if they did it was after they had been sentenced. A fairly easy matter, he decided, to ship aboard a "Coast trader" and work his way up from Freetown to Bahia Arenas. In his waking dreams he chuckled to think that he was scoring over his dead partner, Captain Cain.

That Pengelly was a vindictive man was putting the case mildly. Although he had every reason to believe that Cain, whom he had so treacherously treated, had been lost in the depth-charged submarine, death had not squared the account.

It has been said that a Yorkshireman will carry a stone in his pocket for ten years on the chance of getting even with the man who has grievously wronged him by hurling the missile at his head. With equal truth it may be added that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the Yorkshireman will, when he has his long-sought enemy at his mercy, surprise both himself and his aggressor by a spontaneous and generous forgiveness. But not so a Cornishman with Spanish blood in his veins, such as Pengelly was. He will pursue his vindictiveness relentlessly, and even if the object of his wrath escape by death he is not satisfied. Unable to have his enemy in the flesh, he will continue to revile his memory.

Pengelly was still anathematising his supposed deceased partner when he fell asleep. Once lost to the world his slumbers were so deep that hours passed before he awoke with a start and found the sunshine streaming obliquely through the gaps in the furze above his head.

For a few moments he could not realise where he was. The unexpected change of environment from the grim cell, the absence of the peremptory summons for the convicts to begin another day of hard, profitless toil, required some time for comprehension.

A wheezing cough brought Pengelly's tautened nerves "up all standing." His first instinct was to take to his heels; his second to clench his gnarled fist, and, if necessary, to smite the discoverer of his hiding-place into a state of insensibility.

Then, as he looked, he realised that he was in no immediate danger. His retreat had not been found.

Lying under a bush at less than five yards away, was a man whose garb pronounced him to be of the seafaring class. His face was turned in Pengelly's direction, but the convict was able to reassure himself that those upturned eyes had not seen him. The man was coughing violently, the effort shaking his whole frame and causing beads of perspiration to stand out on his mahogany-coloured forehead. By his side was a bundle tied up in a blue handkerchief, while a few feet away was half a loaf.

Ravenously Pengelly eyed the bread and the supposed owner; decided that it would be too risky to attempt to filch the food from a man who obviously was in a very weak condition. The prolonged fit of coughing warned him that if passers-by were attracted by the sound he would run a risk of discovery.

Pengelly was meditating an unobtrusive retreat when the fit of coughing passed.

The man began to mumble, incoherently at first, but gradually the short and rapid sentences became clear.

"That much for an extra master's ticket! . . . Fifteen years in command. . . .

Eighteen months on the beach, and now: a berth afore the mast, an' they tell me I'm lucky to get that. . . . While the jolly old War was on it was Merchant Jack this an' Merchant Jack that. . . . Nothin' but 'what a brave fellow he is to bring us our food, U-boats notwithstanding'. . . . And now——"

The voice trailed off into incoherent mumbling.

Pengelly, listening intently, forgot his troubles in listening to those of the other man. In a way there was a bond between them. Both had been merchant service heroes of the war; both were "wash-outs." In Pengelly's case it was chiefly the slackness of the shipping industry that had forced him along the downward path of crime; in that of this waif of the sea the same cause had hurled him from the quarter-deck to the unsympathetic "beach," and apparently was now about to pitch the old master-mariner into the fore-peak of a tramp.

"Afore the mast on a twelve-hundred tonner," muttered the man. "And once I was in command of a twelve-thousand-ton vessel! . . . Take it or leave it, they told me. . . . What was a man to do?"

Another fit of coughing interrupted the ex-master mariner's address to an unseen audience consisting of one desperate convict.

"Jerusalem!" ejaculated Pengelly. "He'll never ship aboard another craft unless it's got a flat lid and a flat bottom, an' a fathom in length at that. Strikes me he's slipping his cable fast."

Rapidly the convict summed up the situation. He was that type of man who possessed almost every imaginable bad trait—a blackguard, ruffian, confirmed liar and one who would not hesitate to turn against and betray his closest chum. Yet somewhere in this unsavoury cesspit lurked a small, a very feeble, spark of sympathy towards the human wreck but five yards from him.

The man was obviously very ill. Would it be safe, Pengelly asked himself, to go to his assistance without the almost absolute certainty of finding himself behind prison bars again within the next few hours.

The spot where the old merchant skipper lay was screened from observation from the high road, but the old man's coughing and now incoherent muttering would be audible to any one passing along.

For some moments Pengelly hesitated, then decided to increase the distance between them.

"Like as not, some one will stumble across him," he thought. "But yet——"

A horrible rattle in the throat of the dying man interrupted the convict's train of thoughts. Raising himself on his hands the old sailor gasped violently, then his extended arms gave way and he sank face downwards upon the ground.

An uncanny silence followed.

Pengelly waited, half expecting to hear the sounds of curious passers-by attracted by the noise. For a full five minutes he remained on the alert. Now that the man was undoubtedly dead the convict's sympathy had vanished. He could do nothing for the dead, but the dead might be able to do something for him.

A quarter of an hour later, Pengelly took the high road, clad in the clothes of the late mercantile seaman and carrying the handkerchief-covered bundle under his arm. The corpse on which the broad-arrowed clothing had been drawn, Pengelly had hidden under the gorse.

"Reckon he'll not be found for weeks," mused the ruffian. "When he is, it'll take more'n a Crowner to prove that it isn't Paul Pengelly."

## CHAPTER X

### A VENTURE FAILS

A good-natured motorist noticing a sturdy, white-haired mariner tramping along the road, gave Pengelly a lift nearly into Taunton, a distance of about thirty miles. This was a rare slice of good luck in more senses than one. Not only was the convict quickly and comfortably carried over a long stretch of the distance between him and Bristol, but it enabled him to escape possible detection.

So firm a faith had Pengelly in his own coolness that he had taken to the road unhesitatingly, now that he wore the clothes of the deceased ex-master mariner, and was ready to walk past a policeman without turning a hair. But when the car tore past a couple of warders who were questioning a yokel at a cross-roads the convict felt all the former terrors return and thanked his good fortune that the sleuths did not glance twice at the owner of the car and his companion.

On the outskirts of Taunton, Pengelly was set down, his benefactor giving him five shillings to help him on his way, and wondering on the unusual reticence on the part of his passenger and his ignorance of topical events displayed in the few scraps of conversation.

The ex-convict, too, was aware of this. Even a few months on Dartmoor take a lot of making up as far as being in touch with the outside world is concerned. He realised that he would have to "go slow" until he had picked up the train of events, and had been able to "pitch a yarn," and, what was more, stick to it.

He was too wary to attempt to seek a bed in a common lodging-house, but towards the end of the day he prevailed upon a good-natured farmer to allow him to sleep in his hay-loft with the sole proviso that no smoking was allowed.

"No smoking," rejoined Pengelly, "I wish I had something to smoke."

With which the farmer gave him half a packet of cigarettes and told him to smoke in the open, and then come to the back door for a glass of cider.

Left to himself, Pengelly took the opportunity to overhaul his possessions, although he had already made a brief examination of the contents of the dead man's pockets.

The examination showed that the old master mariner's name was Solomon Tuke and that, according to a letter found in a salt-stained pocket-book, he had been offered a berth as A.B. on the s.s. *Tombo*, which was due to leave Bristol on the following Saturday for Accra, calling at Bathurst, Freetown and Dixcove. It was apparent from the way in which the missive was written that the person obtaining the

post for Solomon Tuke was unknown to him, but had taken pity on him through an appeal from the former master mariner.

The only other articles in the pockets were a knife, a faded photograph, certificates and seafaring documents and a small bottle of capsules without a label. The last-named Pengelly threw away.

He next turned his attention to the bundle. It contained two blue-and-white checked shirts, a cholera belt, a pair of socks and an old silver watch without hands. This comprised Solomon Tuke's entire sea-going kit. In the toe of one of the socks, Pengelly found something wrapped up in a piece of tissue paper: a sixpence and a three-penny bit.

"He was on the rocks, right enough," commented the convict, as he transferred the coins to keep company with his five shillings.

The next night found the convict at Axbridge, and on the Friday evening he arrived at Bristol, where he was not at all flattered by the official description of Paul Pengelly that stared at him from almost every hoarding he encountered.

Hitherto Pengelly had not set foot in Bristol, nor had he even served in Bristol ships, yet he found himself wondering whether by chance any of the officers or hands of the s.s. *Tombo* might be known to him. That was a risk he must run, trusting to chance that his altered appearance, following the destruction of the *Alerte*, would be in his favour. Again, some of the crew might have served under Captain Solomon Tuke in his palmy days, or have been shipmates with him in less favourable auspices.

Inquiring for the s.s. *Tombo*, he found she was not at Bristol but at Avonmouth, and that she was due to leave at tide-time, which happened to be at 4 a.m.

Pengelly took train for the five-mile journey, found the ship and went aboard; reported to the bo'sun, and was asked why he hadn't reported earlier, the request being embellished with a few chosen specimens garnered from that officer's extensive vocabulary.

Ten minutes later Pengelly, having "stowed his duds," was fast asleep in a stuffy bunk in the tramp's fo'c'sle.

During her voyage out he managed to shape fairly well, although at first he had some difficulty in responding promptly to the name "Tuke"; but his relief was great when he found that no one on board showed any signs of recognising him as late second in command of the pirate submarine *Alerte*.

As the *Tombo* neared the scene of the *Alerte*'s last adventure, Pengelly began to devise some scheme to revisit Bahia Arenas, but without success. He could see the place on the port hand, its mangroves just discernible through the miasmic mists. But since there are no means of leaving a tramp doing a steady six knots except by

jumping overboard and swimming—a feat he would have attempted with every prospect of success were it not for the presence of sharks, since, like most Cornishmen, he could swim for long distances—he had to stand and watch until the desired place faded away on the port quarter.

It was not until the *Tombo* brought up in the estuary of the Gambia River that a chance presented itself. The difficulty was to get clear of the ship, for as soon as he was missed the Old Man would inform the authorities at Bathurst and probably delay sailing while an exhaustive search was being made.

The idea suggested itself to him that he might try the very old trick of leaving his clothes on the beach and thus giving the impression that he had been drowned while bathing; but he quickly dismissed that scheme. Unable to get other clothes without “giving himself away,” Pengelly realised that the scanty garments worn by the natives would render him too conspicuous if he attempted to follow their example.

Before the ship weighed Pengelly had scored again. Contriving to get hold of a cartridge, he extracted the cordite and ate it. In a couple of hours he looked as if he had one foot in the grave. The Old Man, scared out of his wits lest the malady would spread to the rest of the crew, had him sent ashore and placed in hospital.

Twenty-four hours after the *Tombo* had sailed, the case-hardened malingerer was as fit as a fiddle.

His next step was to engage on board a small motor-launch, the owner of which did a fairly good trade—often of a highly illegal nature—with the natives along the coast. Being of a grasping nature, the owner listened to Pengelly’s hints about treasure buried in the Faltuba River, and, convinced that there was something in it since his informant was anxious to visit the spot, agreed to work the claim on equal terms.

Ten days later the launch, having covered some two hundred and fifty miles of coastwise cruising, arrived at Bahia Arenas.

As he gazed at the familiar lagoon, Pengelly could not help thinking of the *Alerte*, whose shattered remains lay in the sandy bed fathoms beneath the launch’s keel; thought, too, of his partner and rival who, as he was fully convinced, had found his tomb within the rusting hull of the pirate submarine; gloated over his prospects of laying his hands upon the booty, and regretted that he would have to hand over one-half of the find to the other beach-comber seated in the launch. Were it not for the four kroomen comprising the crew, Pengelly would not have hesitated to knock his temporary partner over the head. . . . Then, too, he remembered that there would be difficulties in explaining the man’s disappearance, and still greater ones to give a convincing account of how he came to be in possession of so much wealth.

Still plotting, Pengelly headed the launch towards the mouth of the river. It was flood-tide, and the boat made good progress up stream between the mangroves. The air was moist and reeked with a nauseating odour resembling that of decaying marigolds; flies abounded, mosquitoes *pinging* in swarms about the ears of the two white men. The owner took considerable quantities of whisky, but Pengelly, from motives that had nothing to do with virtue, refused the proffered bottle again and again.

"How much farther, Tuke?" asked the owner irritably.

"Matter of a mile or so," replied Pengelly. "We'll have the boodle within an hour, never you fear. We must handle the stuff ourselves, an' not give the niggers a chance to look in."

"Course!" hiccupped his companion. "Fair does between pals, but we ain't here to—to—what's that?"

"Only a crocodile," replied Pengelly, glancing in the direction to which the man's outstretched and shaking hand pointed.

Crocodiles are common to rivers of tropical Africa, and consequently the sight of one would not cause unusual comment on the part of the old "Coaster." The inference Pengelly deduced was that his companion was not only drunk, but that he "saw things." In this state he would be certain to "give the show away" to the observant Kroomen.

Presently Pengelly switched off the ignition, put the helm hard-a-port, and allowed the launch to run gently aground on the left bank of the river, the tide being sufficiently high to enable him to carry way over the mud.

It was about half a mile from the place where he had previously landed with the looted spoil from the *Bronx City*, but he calculated that the unusual exertion of having to walk that distance would steady his inebriated partner. Then, telling the head "boy" to take the launch higher up stream, and run her ashore at a given signal, Pengelly took the arm of his companion and urged him along at a rapid pace.

"I shay——" expostulated the owner.

"Nearly there!" interrupted Pengelly. "In a few minutes you'll be a rich man."

"Of course, Tuke, of course," rejoined the other, blinking in the hot sunshine. "Risch man—nat'rally. Pay you half my price. That's fairish, isn't it, Tuke? Bet ten to one you didn't know of it fairly. Shouldn't be 'tall surprised if you was one of them pirates. Lemme shee: *Bronx City*, wasn't it?"

Hot rage surged in Pengelly's breast. In his maudlin state the old beach-comber had revealed both his plans and his suspicions. Evidently he was convinced that "Tuke" was one of the *Alerte*'s crew, and that, trading upon this knowledge, he

meant to blackmail him into parting with the whole of the booty for a trifling sum in cash.

For some moments the launch owner's life hung by a thread until Pengelly, realising the danger that he might be accused of murder, thrust his knife back into the sheath. He firmly meant to put the fellow out of the way, but there must be a neater way of doing it.

At length Pengelly, still urging his companion along, reached the spot where the booty had been so carefully hidden. Then he stood stock still, gazing dully at the grass-grown cavity.

He was not the first to be disappointed over the loot from the *Bronx City*, but his dejection was none the less on that account.

"Where ish't?" inquired the other thickly.

"Gone," replied Pengelly.

Expressing neither anger nor disappointment at the information, the beach-comber turned fishy eyes upon his companion.

"P'rapsh it's sunk a bit," he suggested. "Lemme see."

Rolling into the hole the man got on his knees and began scratching the soil with his hands.

Pengelly paid no attention to him. His whole thoughts were centred upon the problem that now confronted him. Deprived of the booty that he himself had hidden, threatened with vague hints of exposure, he was now stranded on a West Coast with little prospect of finding a ship. Doubtless the old beach-comber would be in a furious passion when he realised that he had been duped, and would probably denounce "Tuke" as a pirate—if he had the chance. The booty hidden in Silas Porthoustoc's cottage at Mousehole, the loot buried on the banks of the Faltuba—Pengelly had failed to lay his hands on either. Remained the money Cain had had transferred to Bahia. Saldanha, he recalled, was the name of the pirate captain's agent. Well, the next goal of Pengelly's efforts must be Bahia. . . .

Suddenly Pengelly's thoughts were interrupted by a grim chuckle from his intoxicated companion. He had unearthed a strip of green rot-proof canvas and was holding it up with both hands. Right across the fabric were stencilled in black letters the words, s.s. *Bronx City*.

"Didn't I shay, Tuke, as you were a pirate?" prattled the man. "Proves it, doesn't it, eh? Blood-monish to be earned, eh, Tuke? . . . No, no! Mean no offensh, Tuke. Take it back. You an' me's pals . . . pals most certainlysh."

With a swift movement Pengelly grasped the tell-tale piece of canvas from the other's nerveless fingers. The beach-comber, frightened at the action, sat down on

the side of the hole and, drawing a flask from his pocket, drank deeply.

Pengelly let him drink; then holding him by the arm led him back to the bank, where he signalled for the launch to run ashore.

Hauling the owner over the turtle-back deck, Pengelly carried him up and made him sit down on the deck in the space between the transom and the cockpit, with his feet on the stern bench.

"Boss him drunk!" he announced to the head Krooman. "Start motor!"

The negro grinned at the obvious information and proceeded to crank the engine. Pengelly at the helm put the reverse gear into action and the launch backed away from the scene of the thwarted enterprise.

In mid-stream, Pengelly thrust the lever into the ahead position and shaped a course towards the lagoon, glancing from time to time at his inebriated companion, who was showing signs of subsiding into a drunken slumber.

Suddenly one of the Kroomen gave a shout and pointed to an object dead ahead. It was a large floating log. Pengelly had already seen it.

At the warning he reversed, throttling down as he did so. The launch lost way and gradually began to go astern. He gave her full throttle, and, trembling under the pulsations of the four cylinders, the boat's speed rapidly increased.

Then with a deft movement and without attempting to throttle down, Pengelly put the reversing lever from hard astern to full ahead. With a violent jerk the launch checked her sternway and forged ahead. The change of momentum had the effect Pengelly had anticipated. There was a sullen splash, hardly audible above the roar of the exhaust. Without turning his head Pengelly knew that his would-be blackmailer had been jerked completely over the stern.

The launch travelled quite a hundred yards before Pengelly paid any heed to the shouts of the native crew, although he was fully aware of the cause of their excitement; but when he did look astern, his well-assumed anxiety to rescue his partner was calculated to disarm any suspicion.

He knew perfectly well that the surest method of picking up a man for a single-screw vessel is to keep the engines ahead, circling and approaching the person to be rescued bows-on and if possible head to wind, losing way when close alongside the drowning man. Deliberately Pengelly put the reverse gear on hard astern, with the result which he fully expected. Instead of being able to steer the boat as she gathered sternway, the use of the helm had hardly any effect. The launch made a wide sweep well clear of the struggling man.

One of the Kroobois threw a lifebuoy as the boat backed past, but it fell short, and by this time Pengelly's partner was too far gone to get to it.

Even as the ex-pirate attempted another purposely bungled manœuvre the luckless man disappeared beneath the chocolate-coloured waters of the Faltuba.

## CHAPTER XI

### DISILLUSIONED

“Maquisha!” (Finished!) exclaimed the head Krooman with a terrific grin, as if his former master’s death was something of the nature of a boon to his black crew.  
“You boss. Make lib for talk one-time. Den we can do, savvy?”

Pengelly nodded. He understood that this was the Krooman’s declaration of willingness to serve the new master.

His chief anxiety was to get across the Atlantic. Now that his would-be betrayer was out of the way it would be policy to return to Bathurst and tell a plausible story of his partner’s disappearance. The natives would back him up, giving evidence in all good faith. On the other hand, if he failed to return to the Gambia the officials would “smell a rat,” and probably a warrant would be issued for his arrest, and a description of him sent to almost every port in the civilised world. Pengelly did not want any more warrants issued for his apprehension; he had had too many already, and perhaps he might not be so lucky next time.

When at length the launch returned to Bathurst with only a gallon of petrol left in her tank, the news of the disappearance of Jimmy Rice (curiously enough, Pengelly had not previously heard the name of his partner) was accepted without much comment on the part of the white colony. Rice had a bad reputation as a “fire-water” smuggler, and was known to be a very hard drinker. There was an official inquiry, at which the Kroomen were all agreed that the affair was a pure accident, thereby clearing Pengelly of all suspicion; and since the latter’s plight was made public, “Solomon Tuke” was an object of sympathy, and a subscription list was opened on his behalf.

A week later, since the s.s. *Tombo* was not expected to call at Bathurst on the homeward voyage, Pengelly obtained a berth on board a petroleum carrier returning to the Mexican Gulf to fill up with another cargo of oil for “The Coast.”

On the first day after clearing the Gambia, Pengelly was standing easy during the First Dog Watch when one of the hands remarked:

“Strikes me, Tuke, I’ve seen you afore. S’welp me! I know the cut of your jib.”

“More’n like,” agreed Pengelly, concealing his annoyance. “Seein’ I’ve bin afloat for twenty years off an’ on, ’tain’t nothin’ out of the common. Where d’ye reckon you’ve seen me?”

“Must a’ been shipmates afore,” rejoined the man. “Lemme see, I’ve served aboard the——”

He mentioned the names of nearly a score of vessels, finishing up with the s.s. *Pickfast*—the collier Cain had detained in order to tranship his first captive, the Admiralty agent, Chamter.

Pengelly gave an involuntary exclamation of surprise.

“No, you weren’t aboard o’ ‘er,” pursued the man. “‘Twas only last year. We were bound from Noocas’l to Kingston, Jamaiky, wi’ coals. . . . Love a duck! You weren’t the brass-bound bloke wot brought off a cove to us to take along to the West Indies?”

“Never was a brass-bound bloke,” lied Pengelly, “What made you think I was? Let’s have the yarn.”

“Well, it wur like this: we was standin’ down Channel when we was signalled to ‘eave-to. When we did, the vessel wot spoke us—I can’t recall ‘er name—sent a boat off to us. There was a orficer in charge of ‘er an’ ‘e axed our Old Man to take a passenger—an undersized sort o’ chap. That there orficer was summat like you—not exactly, though—an’ had your sort o’ voice.”

“It weren’t me,” declared Pengelly, purposely imitating the speech of a “shell-back.”

“Well, it ain’t up ter me to contradict a mate to his very face,” rejoined the man, with a deliberate wink. “But ‘tain’t the first time a man’s shipped under a tally that ain’t ‘is own.”

“Wot d’ye mean?” demanded Pengelly.

“No offence, mate,” replied the other. “Don’t suppose it ‘ud make a hap’orth o’ difference if you was the chap I took you for—but I’m a bit curious.”

This conversation shook Pengelly up considerably. There was no knowing what it might lead up to. The seaman might know more than he cared to reveal. He looked the sort of man. The ship was equipped with wireless. Once *that* got to business on his account, Pengelly realised that he would be hopelessly trapped, hauled back to prison, while there would be a good round sum as a reward to be shared between the persons responsible for his rearrest.

For the next week nothing occurred to cause Pengelly’s fears to return. Although he kept closely on his guard, the man whom he distrusted never referred to the disquieting conversation, and gradually the pirate’s state of mind grew calmer.

What he feared more than anything was the possibility of the news of his escape from Dartmoor reaching the ship; in which case the man who had challenged his identity might put two and two together and denounce him to the captain.

The ship was within two hundred miles of Cape San Roque when chance again intervened. A wireless message was received stating that in view of the fact that a

state of hostilities existed between the Republic of Paraquil del Norte and the Allied States of Ouro Preto and Banda Rica, the ship was to put into Bahia and await further orders.

This information was received with enthusiasm by the officers and crew. It indicated that they were to be employed in running oils for one of the combatants, with the certainty of receiving extra pay as "war risks," and everything considered the danger was not great. Neither side had employed mines for sea defence; nor did they possess submarines. If the ship were captured that would entail a certain amount of hardship, but the pay of the hands would continue. On the top of everything, there was a spice of adventure that appealed to the roving natures as something above the ordinary everyday dangers that Merchant Jack regards on the principle that familiarity breeds contempt.

As for Pengelly, he would have liked to have danced a hornpipe out of sheer excitement and delight. Bahia! That was the goal of his present endeavours. He was not going south to engage in blockade-running at sixty dollars a month. He would desert at Bahia and pay a visit to Dom Saldanha, and press his claim for the money deposited by Captain Cain in the name of Thomas Trevorrick—money that formed part of the ransom extorted from the passenger with the *Pickfast* under circumstances to which Pengelly's questioner had recently alluded.

Accordingly, Pengelly smuggled himself ashore within two hours of the ship's arrival at Bahia, bribed a Brazilian Jew to allow him to hide in his house and to supply him with clothes calculated to give him the appearance of a man of means. His next step was to induce the Jew to get a lawyer to draw up a false affidavit to the effect that Solomon Tuke was the next-of-kin of Thomas Trevorrick, deceased, and therefore entitled to the money deposited in Trevorrick's name with Saldanha's.

He knew perfectly well that such a procedure would not stand a ghost of a chance in England, but in Brazil things were worked differently. A little bluff backed up by forged documents, he decided, ought to effect the desired transfer of Captain Cain's and his own share of the plunder.

Failing that, he determined to risk revealing his identity as Paul Pengelly, since he had Cain's word for it that the money was deposited in their joint names with Saldanha's—and more than likely Dom Saldanha was a shady individual or Cain would not have placed his illegally-gotten wealth in the Brazilian's safe.

The tanker which had carried him across the Atlantic had hardly cleared the harbour when Pengelly emerged from his retreat and shaped a course down the Avenida 15 Mayo to the offices of Dom Saldanha. He was rigged out in alpaca coat, white waistcoat with scarlet cummerbund, full-cut trousers and brown leather shoes.

Tilted rakishly on his head he wore a panama. His unkempt beard had been trimmed to "torpedo" shape, his white hair had been cut close and dyed to dark brown. Altogether, Pengelly fancied himself, and fondly imagined that his appearance, combined with his ready resource and his forged credentials, would be more than sufficient to enable him to carry out his coup.

He was shown into the private office of Dom Saldanha—a suave, well-set-up Brazilian of pure Portuguese descent, who spoke English fluently and with only a few mispronunciations.

As Pengelly began to state his case, Dom Saldanha was all attention and politeness, but when his visitor began to get down to what he considered hard and telling facts, the Brazilian's face assumed a puzzled and incredulous look.

"My dear Mr. Tuke!" he protested. "I am afraid there must be some misunderstanding. The name of Thomas Trevorick is an entire stranger to us. No one of that name has deposited in our vaults. More, I can safely assert that in the year you mention we transacted no business with any client in England."

"But surely this is a mistake," expostulated the bewildered Pengelly.

"Assuredly," agreed Dom Saldanha blandly. "A mistake on your part. To satisfy you, I will produce a list of persons who have deposited money and securities with us in the year you gave. Of course this is departing from our usual custom, but in the circumstances——"

He touched a bell.

"—Meanwhile, if you are contemplating entrusting us with any financial transactions, Mr. Tuke, you may rest assured that we will give the matter our closest attention."

The door opened and a clerk appeared. To him Dom Saldanha gave certain instructions in Portuguese. The man returned with a leather-bound volume and placed it in front of his employer. It was a list of names and addresses, with the respective ledger folios. Although Pengelly scanned the pages, not a single name of English origin occurred.

"That, I think, must satisfy you," remarked Dom Saldanha.

Pengelly nodded dazedly.

"And there is no further business? No?"

The Brazilian placed his foot upon a knob concealed under the carpet, with the result that the bell of his desk telephone rang peremptorily.

Dom Saldanha raised the receiver, listened to an imaginary request and turned to his visitor.

"I must wish you good morning," he said suavely. "A client has just telephoned

for an interview."

Pengelly went out. As soon as he had gone, Saldanha shut the top right-hand drawer of his pedestal desk. In it, ready to hand, reposed a loaded automatic. More than once Saldanha had to be very drastic in dealing with desperate callers.

"I wonder what he did really want?" mused the Brazilian as he locked the drawer. "*Gracias a Dios*; he went quietly."

But Pengelly was raging furiously by the time he gained the street, cursing the memory of his partner for his perfidy, although he forgot his perfidy towards *him*.

Three times he had failed to lay his hands on various loot that had fallen into the clutches of the captain of the pirate submarine. And now, once more, he was stranded and practically penniless in a strange land, with the last hope of enriching himself on Cain's unlawful possession totally shattered.

Within two minutes of the time when Pengelly left the offices of Saldanha, Captain Cain entered them.

## CHAPTER XII

### KAYBURN, THE AIRMAN

On the day following Cain's interview with General Leon y Poseda the bombardment of the town of Bomanares was resumed with more than its usual vigour; so much so that when the general took the pirate captain in his car to visit the Air establishment, the road on the outskirts of the town was subjected to such a furious shelling that to proceed was too risky a procedure for the Paraquilan officer.

Cain, glancing at his companion, could see that Poseda had the wind up—badly. Nor was the driver in a better state. He was trembling like a leaf.

"It is frightful," commented Poseda. "They will smash the car."

"In that case, suppose we walk?" suggested Cain coolly.

Poseda made no reply.

"I hope I'm not keeping you from your duties," continued Cain. "In view of the serious nature of the offensive, perhaps you ought to be with the troops."

"It is unnecessary," replied the general, failing to note the thinly-veiled sarcasm. "My orders were sent to the troops two hours ago. *Dios!* The firing is fearful. The enemy must have got hold of some new kind of shell, and many of them."

Viewed from a hollow half-way up the side of a hill, the bombardment did not strike Cain as being intensive. The shells were of a high-explosive type, doing little damage—except where they actually hit, the force of the charge going for the most part straight up in the air. It was the deafening crashes that got on Poseda's nerves.

Presently through the glasses Cain noticed a strong force of hostile infantry issuing from the trenches with the evident intention of rushing a position on the slope of a hill. The position, of course, would give the enemy a chance to penetrate the cordon of forts on the landward side of the town.

The infantry advanced in open order, receiving little, if any, resistance from the Paraquilians holding the defences. Possibly the latter had been completely demoralised by the initial bombardment. At any rate, hardly a rifle-shot rang out, and the defending ordnance was silent.

"General," remarked Cain. "It looks as if you are wanted to stop that assault. Are there no reserves to be rushed up?"

Poseda stirred uneasily. There was now no reason why the car should not proceed, for the shelling of the road had ceased.

Before he could frame a reply, the loud drone of an aeroplane was heard almost immediately overhead. On the underside of its lower main planes were the distinctive

markings of the Paraquil del Norte Air Service. It was the same bus that had driven off the Ouro Preto gunboats in pursuit of the *Nike*.

The biplane attacked, but Cain noticed what he had previously commented upon before—the apparent reluctance of the airman to get within effective range. Maintaining a height of about three thousand feet, he dropped bomb after bomb, all of which fell wide of the now bunched up troops as they converged towards their objective.

Yet the airman turned the scale of battle. Caught in the open, the hostile troops bolted for their trenches. As far as Cain could see by means of his binoculars, no one appeared to be hit.

"Funny blighter, that airman," he mused. "Why on earth he doesn't plane down and machine-gun that mob beats me. He's simply throwing away a superb chance."

General Poseda clapped his hands in sheer delight.

"They are beaten!" he exclaimed. "That airman is your compatriot; the man we are going to see. He will be back at the aerodrome before us."

Poseda was correct in his surmise, for when at length the car drew up outside the aerodrome, it was met by a tall, slim, pleasant-faced man of not more than thirty years of age.

The general referred to Cain as "Commandante Trevor of the Paraquil del Norte Air Fleet" when the airman was introduced to him, and followed up by embracing and kissing the "hero of the glorious victory," much to the "hero's" embarrassment.

"Pleased to meet you, Kayburn!" exclaimed Cain.

The two Englishmen gripped hands cordially. Cain, on his part, took at once to the pleasant-faced man, especially as he was able to reassure himself at the first glance that he was an utter stranger, and therefore not likely to know anything about the pirate captain's past. With that sound judgment of his Cain realised, too, that the faint-hearted stunts of the aviator were not due to temerity. There was another reason: that he meant to find out.

"We have come on a visit of inspection," declared Poseda pompously.

Cain could hardly refrain from smiling. The whole business appeared to him to be a sort of comic opera. Only in South and Central America could petty Republics exist under such a display of buffoonery. And the tragedy of it all was that there were excellent material and splendid conditions being completely neglected, or rather suppressed, through the incompetency of leaders of the Poseda type.

It was an aerodrome! Even Kayburn positively blushed for shame when he pointed out the two biplanes that represented the Republic's heavier-than-air fleet. Cain had seen vastly superior machines sold by the Disposal Board at home for less

than twenty pounds. It seemed a miracle that either of them could leave the ground.

Cain made no comment. He could see that Kayburn did not require one. At any rate, these antiquated buses were useless for the purpose of transporting his fifty thousand dollars out of the Republic of Paraquil del Norte. Somewhat sceptically he inquired where the airship was housed.

The "shed" was about half a mile away. Considering the resources at his command, Kayburn had made rather a good show with it. A natural gorge or cañon formed the floor and sides, the rocky walls towering sheer to a height of nearly two hundred feet. The eighty-feet gap from brink to brink had been spanned by a heavy trellis-work of timber, which was boarded on with thick planks, on the top of which sandbags were placed sufficient to stop a direct hit from the heaviest projectile the hostile Republics possessed.

The airship was by no means a giant, measuring only four hundred feet in length, and with an extreme width of sixty-two feet. It was of the rigid type, and was propelled by four side propellers actuated by chain-drive to motors each of 600 horse-power. Originally it had been constructed in the United States for Polar exploration, but for some reason the project was abandoned and the airship was sold to Brazil for use in making a survey of the upper reaches of the Amazon. This scheme also failed to materialise, and the airship passed into the hands of her present owners, the Government of Paraquil del Norte.

"She's in fair condition," declared Kayburn, "only you see, sir, we haven't a crew for her. And there's another difficulty—hydrogen gas. We've several thousand cubic feet stored away under pressure, but not enough for severe flying conditions."

Undoubtedly Kayburn would have liked to say more, but for the presence of General Poseda; and Cain quickly realised that the latter's company was a brake upon the wheel of mutual confidences.

"Look me up on board the *Nike*, Kayburn," said Cain promptly.

"Thanks awfully, I will," replied the airman, with equal celerity.

Poseda scowled with annoyance. He realised that he had been circumvented. In his slow, pompous manner of speech he had been "left standing" by the rapidity of Cain's invitation and its acceptance. As matters stood at present he did not want any exchange of confidences between the two Englishmen.

"Why not dine with me, gentlemen?" he asked, concealing his chagrin under the cloak of an oily smile.

"Sorry," replied Cain briefly; "I cannot leave the ship this evening."

At six in the afternoon Dick Kayburn came on board.

"You ticked that old bird off all right," he remarked. "I could see he was out to

prevent our enjoying a chin-wag. My word, it's a blessing having an Englishmen to talk with in this forsaken hole."

"Then what made you come to it, might I ask?" inquired Cain, in a way that Kayburn could not possibly take offence.

"Luck—hard or otherwise," replied the airman. "To go back to the beginning of my flying career I was a flight lieutenant in the old R.F.C. They tell me I was pretty good at stunts, but a rotten pilot. In fact, one night I unloaded the goods on Dutch territory when I thought I was bombing Dusseldorf. In the R.A.F. I was kept pretty busy just over the lines—they wouldn't trust me on the long-distance bombing stunts after that. Then I was demobbed, and at a loose end, like hundreds of fellows in '19. Naturally I wanted a job. I found one. A bloke who claimed to be an ex-officer who had been blown up three times and gassed three times 'pitched the yarn' and we started on a partnership show. He vanished, so did my two hundred pounds. Afterwards I found out that he never was in khaki, but had been munitioneering in a cushy show well beyond the air-raid area. No doubt he'd been blown up three times —by his foreman for being late, I take it; and as for the gas—well he'd plenty of it left when I met him!"

"That tore it. I was practically on the rocks when I got a billet out here as flying instructor to the Paraquil del Norte Commercial Aviation Company. They started with a dozen old buses, and in a month there were only three left. Then the bust up with Banda Rica came off, and the blighters sort of roped me in. I couldn't leave the place, I didn't want to starve, so I signed on. I take good care to go slow, though."

"So I have observed," agreed Cain. "Might I ask why?"

"For one reason, I don't see why I should risk my neck for the sake of President Lippo Bramo and his underlings," explained Kayburn. "If I'd volunteered for the job it would have been a different matter. And there's another reason: I haven't any quarrel with the Republics of Ouro Preto and Banda Rica, and it's a rotten business blowing men to bits when they're not enemies of yours."

"It would be interesting to know whether they would entertain the same sentiments towards you if you fell into their hands," remarked Cain dryly. "'Fraid I'm not so discriminating: I've just landed a few thousand rounds of small-arms ammunition and a tidy number of rifles."

"Poseda wanted me to bomb the capitals of the hostile Republics," continued Kayburn. "I told him I couldn't; said the old bus couldn't keep up for more than an hour. That's a fact, too. So I just potter around and drop a few eggs just to keep the other crowd from butting in too close."

"That will never end the war," declared Cain. "What's wanted is something to

put the wind up the enemy. Scare 'em stiff; force them to ask for terms."

"They'd do that were it not for old Bramo, Poseda and Gimletto," said Kayburn. "Those chaps are the stumbling-blocks. The country would forge ahead all right if they were out of it."

"So I think," agreed Cain. "I came here with the avowed intention of piling up dollars, but since then I've rather taken a liking to the place. It wants disinfecting and fumigating—meaning that the present Government should be pushed out of it, and then things will improve. I'm thinking of trying to improve matters."

"You are, sir?" asked Kayburn eagerly. "My word, what a topping idea! I'd like to give you a hand, if you'll let me."

"I think it can easily be arranged," replied Cain slowly. "Shifting President Lippo Bramo and staff, I mean. However, there's a matter that in my opinion takes precedence: that's what I want to consult you about. It concerns the root of all evil—money."

"Afraid I've precious little of that, sir," declared Kayburn frankly.

"You never know your luck," rejoined Cain oracularly. "'Tany rate, I've fifty thousand dollars in silver on board at this present moment, part of which belongs to my men. Now I want to get that out of the country, and I fancy General Poseda is on the same lay, with this difference. I made mine honestly. He didn't."

The pirate captain spoke with conviction. According to his tenets, despoiling the Egyptian was honest work, and he had not the faintest scruples when it came to wresting Poseda's hoard from him.

"Now to come to the point," continued Cain. "This airship is, I understand, capable of flying, say, to Copiapo. That place is, as you're probably aware, on the Chilean coast."

"I wasn't," admitted Kayburn frankly. "It's all right for distance, but there's the Andes. She'd never have enough lift to take her over them. 'Sides, there's the return journey."

Cain looked and felt disappointed.

"Can you suggest a place?" he inquired. "Somewhere in fairly stable country where there won't be a revolution, say, within the next six months? Somewhere where we can obtain hydrogen sufficient to give the airship an extended radius of action?"

"There's Ascuncion, in Paraguay——"

"No go," declared Cain. "Paraguay is more often than not in a state of insurrection. Somewhere in the north is what I want, since we can't get over the Andes."

"Sorbombo, then. There's plenty of fairly good coal-gas to be obtained there."

"Where is Sorbombo?" asked the pirate captain. "I've never heard of it."

"Fifty miles from Bahia," replied Kayburn. "That's the place where the airship was stationed when she belonged to the Brazilian Government. They'd supply the gas and won't ask too many questions if payment is promptly forthcoming. And, what's more, the airship shed is still standing."

Cain grunted with satisfaction. At Bahia was his old acquaintance Saldanha. He had not had any transactions with him in the *Alerte* affair, although, he recalled with a grim smile, he had gulled his skulking partner Pengelly into the belief that he had. At any rate, the fifty thousand dollars would be safe with Saldanha.

"I'll see she's navigated there," he declared confidentially, "if you'll be responsible for her management. Your crew will be trustworthy, I hope?"

"I think so," replied Kayburn. "At any rate, they're not jumpy. They'll keep their heads in a tight corner."

"Hope there won't be any tight corners," rejoined Cain grimly. "If I fall I like to fall a few inches. It's better to tumble off the bottom rung of a ladder than to come a cropper from the top. I'll take my men, of course. They'll be handy, being seamen."

"Excuse me, Mr. Trevor," remarked the airman, "but weren't you in the Navy?"

"You haven't met me before, I suppose?" countered Cain.

Kayburn shook his head.

"Not to my knowledge," he replied. "One met hundreds of fellows during the War, but only in a few cases is a face remembered. But you have the cut of a pukka naval officer."

"Lieutenant-Commander," announced Cain. "I retired in January '20. Well, that's settled. Now, how about shanghai-ing the President and his little mob? That business will, I take it, be fairly simple. At any rate, leave details to me. What is more to the point, we can't leave Paraquil without some form of government."

"Exactly, sir," replied Kayburn, "but the present crush will take a lot of beating—for inefficiency."

"Is there any one you could suggest to act as provisional president?" asked Cain. "He'll have to be some one fairly popular—but not too much so—with the populace, and a fellow who'll eat out of our hands when we return. Meanwhile, we must put the wind up the enemy, and that must be timed to take place an hour or so after Bramo & Co. are shanghaied."

It was eleven o'clock at night before Cain and his new ally, Dick Kayburn, parted company. They had carefully laid their plans; it remained to be seen whether deliberation and foresight would reap the reward.

## CHAPTER XIII

### SHANGHAI-ING THE PRESIDENTE

In his most sanguine moments Captain Cain hardly expected that his scheme would go forward without a hitch; but he was quite unprepared for the startling development that occurred in the progress of the War.

The Greek, Basil Zaros, had been given the rank of Capitan-Commandante of the Paraquil del Norte Navy, and was under the direct orders of Almirante Mondez Gimletto. Cain had jestingly remarked that there was no need to shove a gimlet into the Paraquilan ships; they had dry-rot already.

However, Gimletto had an idea and, somewhat unusually for him, proceeded to carry it out. He had one of the steamers, the *Estramarella*, protected with boiler-plates and sandbags, mounted a six-inch gun on her fo'c'sle (which he did on the time-honoured principle of robbing Peter to pay Paul; or, in other words, he took the gun from one of the forts for naval use) and then ordered Zaros to take the *Estramarella* to sea and engage the two blockading gunboats.

The Greek was in a blue funk, but there was no escape. If he refused he would be shot. Vainly he appealed to Cain to save him from the desperate task; the only consolation he received was the remark that he'd joined the Paraquilan Navy by his own choice, and that he must make the best of it.

Accordingly, one dark night the *Estramarella* cast off from the quay and proceeded seawards. All lights in it were obscured, but the hiss of escaping steam from the badly-packed glands of her machinery could be heard for miles.

Trembling as he stood on the bridge of his first command, Zaros wished that he had never been born. His dreams of a farm on the slopes of Mount Hymettus were as hazy as the vapour from the *Estramarella*'s steam-pipe. He debated whether he could not skirt the shore and escape, or else surrender tamely to the enemy, until he remembered that it was the practice of the hostile Republic not to give quarter. Better, he decided, to die fighting than to be propped up against a wall.

His crew were pretty determined men. They would shoot him where he stood rather than surrender. That was an additional inducement to the Greek to do his duty.

Fortifying himself with liberal doses of *meicol*—the Paraquilan equivalent to rum—Zaros held on until he was clear of the harbour. There was a strong easterly wind, and on that account the noise of the escaping steam would be inaudible to the blockading gunboats.

Putting his helm hard-a-starboard, Zaros steered northward, keeping close in-

shore until he reckoned that he was five miles from the enemy ships. Ninety degrees of port-helm brought him back on an easterly course. Then he held until the *Estramarella* was eleven miles from land.

By this time the Ouro Preto gunboats had commenced to run their searchlights, keeping the beams turned upon the entrance to the harbour. At full speed—the *Estramarella* being forced up to six knots at imminent risk of blowing out her boilers—the Paraquilan vessel approached her enemy from the quarter that an attack, if any, was least expected.

A thousand yards . . . nine hundred . . . eight . . . seven.

No sign came from the gunboats. Zaros, chock-a-block with Dutch courage, stopped his engines and waited until the relative positions of the searchlights told him that the enemy ships were about a cable's length apart on opposite and parallel courses.

Then the *Estramarella*'s six-inch quick-firer, trained at fifteen feet below one of the searchlights, opened the ball. At that range it was almost impossible to miss. The shell exploded well aft, completely wrecking the steering-gear. In the confusion both hostile gunboats put their helms hard over. Each, being on the other's turning circle and converging, realised that a collision seemed inevitable; and collide they did, one of the gunboats ramming the other fairly amidships.

Shouts and yells rent the air. The crews were panic-stricken, those of the rammed craft struggling to clamber on to the fo'c'sle of the vessel that had collided with her. There was no attempt made to return the *Estramarella*'s fire.

At this juncture Zaros ordered the *Estramarella*'s searchlight to bear upon the enemy, and, taking in the situation, he promptly opened fire upon the ramming craft.

In five minutes the latter sank. As she did so she left exposed the gaping rent in her consort's side that hitherto had been plugged by her bows. Amidst a roar of escaping steam and the shrieks of the crew, the second gunboat disappeared beneath the waves.

Two hours later the *Estramarella* returned to Bomanares. Although it was well past midnight the town was *en fête*. Zaros, now as drunk as a man can possibly be without losing complete control of his lower limbs, was met and embraced by Almirante Mondez Gimletto, and the President there and then presented him with the Order of the Legion of Paraquil del Norte—a reward which the Greek failed to appreciate when later on he found that no monetary award went with it.

The naval action, insignificant as it was in reality, added immensely to the Government's waning prestige. The blockade was raised, it was declared; victory was now assured.

Unfortunately for this optimism, the allied Republics were stung to renewed activity. The bombardment became a twelve-hour business daily. More troops were rushed up to strengthen the attacking forces; while, to make matters worse for Paraquil, four gunboats appeared in the offing to replace the two that had been lost.

Against these intensified measures, General Poseda and Almirante Gimletto did little or nothing. In consequence, their shortlived popularity waned. There were demonstrations in the plazas, crowds, including many soldiers, parading with shouts of "Down with the Presidente!"

It was shortly after one of these demonstrations that Kayburn suggested to Cain the name of a suitable candidate for the temporary presidency.

"Pedro Aquillo is the man we want," he declared. "He has a fair amount of popularity. I've sounded him, and he's willing to seek election and then to resign—for a consideration, of course."

"Naturally," replied Cain. "Who is he?"

"Father's a Paraquilan; mother, of mixed English and Portuguese descent."

"H'm! Let's hope the British strain is well-nigh eliminated," remarked the pirate captain. "I never had much use for mongrels."

"If it comes to that," countered Kayburn, "is there a more mongrel nation than the British? Saxon, Kelt, Dane, Norman and half a dozen other strains, and the result holds its own with any other nation on the face of the earth."

"Granted," acquiesced Cain, "but all the races you name originate from districts north of the 45th parallel, and as a rule the farther north the better the strain. No, what I kick against is the mongrel with negro or Indian blood in his veins—a Paraquilan, for example. Well, we'll give the fellow a run. Now then; this little stunt concerning the shanghai-ing of the Presidente, when will you complete your arrangements?"

"I'm ready any time," replied the airman. "I suppose we'll make one trip do for both jobs: the transfer of the silver and the abduction of President Lippo Bramo?"

"I made arrangements with Poseda to take charge of his dollars," announced Cain, with a laugh. "He's getting more and more jumpy every hour: thinks the mob will do him in and seize his cash. I say 'his' with reservations. You say your airship's ready for flight? Good; I'll bring up my fifty thousand dollars this afternoon. You'll see to issuing invitations to the President and staff to witness the departure of the airship on a bombing expedition?"

"Rather," rejoined Kayburn, with a chuckle.

Accordingly the silver, escorted by Cain, Barnard, Davidge and Cross, was taken in wagons to the aerodrome and safely deposited in one of the gondolas of

the airship. An hour later another quantity of silver, aggregating 100,000 dollars, was placed on board. It was General Poseda's ill-acquired wealth, and to disarm suspicion it was packed in canisters which bore inscriptions to the effect that they contained "gas."

The flight, suggested by Kayburn and authorised by General Poseda, was to commence half an hour before sunset, and the occasion gave the inhabitants of Bomanares an excuse for yet another fête, which was to be attended by President Bramo, General Poseda, Almirante Gimletto and other heads of Government departments.

Poseda's statement concerning the projected flight—he had given out that it was for the purpose of bombing the capital of Ouro Preto—had the effect of causing another wave of popularity towards the Government. Instead of hisses and shouts of dissent, the President was greeted with enthusiastic *vivas* as in full uniform and attended by his staff he appeared to witness the airship's departure.

The crew of the airship consisted of Cain, a navigating officer in command, Kayburn as pilot and second in command, Barnard, Davidge, Cross and eleven Paraquian airmen on whom Kayburn could rely. The huge vessel, her ballonettes charged to the fullest capacity, was hauled from its shed and "anchored" by means of ropes held by two hundred troops.

"You'll have to issue the invitation to the President," remarked Cain to Kayburn, as the two leant over the rail of the catwalk and surveyed the animated scene. "If I asked Poseda he might smell a rat. . . . I must learn the lingo. How long will it take, do you think?"

"That depends," replied the airman guardedly. "If you know French and Latin that will help a lot, but it rests largely with the individual. Some pick up a knowledge of foreign languages very much quicker than others. You ought to be able to carry on a conversation in a couple of months. . . . Right-o: I'll go and have a pi-jaw with old Bramo."

It was soon evident that Kayburn had a very persuasive manner in dealing with the pompous President. Cain noticed that Poseda frowned and shook his shoulders when Kayburn requested Bramo to come on board and pay a state visit of inspection; but the President, grinning with gratification, led the way, and the rest of the staff had no option but to accompany him.

The gaudily uniformed crowd were shepherded into the fore bomb-dropping compartment, and were listening with the deepest gratification to Kayburn's highly exaggerated description of the powerful nature of the offensive armament, when Cain gave the signal for the men grasping the holding-down rope to let go. The order

was obeyed promptly and without any suspicion on the part of the Paraquilan officer in charge of the "ground-party," possibly because he imagined that the President had suddenly decided to experience a trial flight.

Up soared the airship under the lifting power of her hydrogen-filled gas-bags—so gently that the President and his companions had no idea that the airship was free until the loud cheers of the thousand spectators greeted the daring of the head of the Republic, and the slight swaying movement caused the visitors to gaze at each other with no little apprehension.

A gong rang twice in quick succession—the signal for the motor to be set going.

"What has happened?" demanded Bramo, addressing his guide.

"I'll see, your Excellency," replied Kayburn, and slipping through the doorway he promptly slammed the metal flap and bolted it on the outside.

"Scuppered the lot!" he announced, as he rejoined Cain in the pilot-cabin. "Hear them? They're in a blue funk already."

"They'll have the door down in half a shake," declared the pirate captain. "Go and tell them to stow their row or there'll be trouble."

This Kayburn did, informing the President that he and his companions were prisoners, and that if they gave any trouble he would release the gondola in which they were.

"And it is a long drop, señores," he added. "Already we are eight hundred metres above the ground."

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" demanded the President in none too confident a voice.

"No outrage," replied Kayburn blandly. "It is a general deportation of the late Government of Paraquil carried out at the orders of the provisional President of the Republic. If you give no further trouble you will receive none, but I again warn you that resistance means death."

They were quiet after that. To be deposed was quite a common occurrence as far as the rulers of Paraquil were concerned. Usually death by shooting followed as a natural sequence, but now the procedure promised to be different.

For ten minutes the airship hovered over the northern section of the hostile lines. A few spasmodic rifle-shots greeted her, but in the absence of anti-aircraft guns she was immune from shrapnel.

By the aid of glasses Cain could make out the results of the airship's appearance. Hitherto the besieging forces, although they knew of the fact that Paraquil possessed a huge lighter-than-air craft, were under the impression that either she was unfit to fly or else her crew lacked sufficient confidence and capability

to take her up.

For the most part the Ouro Pretoan troops had taken cover, only a few remaining to fire at the airship. Between the lines men were bolting for whatever shelter that offered, even trusting to the flimsy adobe huts with palm-leaf thatch.

"We could win the war in a couple of hours," declared Cain. "A bomb or two would be an act of humanity."

"I vote we wait, sir," suggested Kayburn. "A little inoffensive demonstration will put the wind up 'em. Later on, if you've no objection, we'll issue an ultimatum, and then pay a visit to Cordoba-da-Fe. That's the most important town in Ouro Preto, although it isn't the capital. Well, sir, we've got the late Paraquilan Government on board; what do you propose to do with them?"

"Maroon 'em," replied Cain grimly. "Not on hostile territory. Much as I dislike these oily-featured individuals, I'm not going to leave them to the tender mercies of the enemy. No; we'll descend in a secluded spot. There's no wind, so there ought to be no risk worth considering. We'll turn them loose. They can't get back to Bomanares, and wouldn't if they could. It wouldn't be exactly healthy for the ex-President to show his face in that place again. Right-o, we've demonstrated enough for to-day."

Ringing for the motors to increase to economical cruising speed, Cain settled the airship on a northerly course, checking direction by reference to a fairly reliable map. In an hour and ten minutes she had traversed the whole length of Ouro Preto and was over the neutral Republic of Preyacal.

"How will that do?" inquired the pirate captain, pointing to an expanse of green surrounded on three sides by dense forests.

"Might," replied Kayburn, bringing his glasses to bear upon the spot. "It's difficult to realise what a temporary landing-ground is like from this height. It may be steeply-sloping ground, although at this altitude it appears to be as flat as a pancake."

"Take her down, then," rejoined Cain, stepping aside to let the airman take control. "If we don't like the look of things we can ascend. According to my reckoning the town of Hujas is only twenty miles away to the east'ard. A tramp of that distance will reduce Almirante Mondez Gimletto's fat considerably."

In practically still air the airship descended until Kayburn checked the descent at eighty feet from the ground. The spot was ideal for the landing, the coarse grass was not too high, while there were sun-dried cracks in the ground to offer excellent holding for the emergency grapnels.

Kayburn gave an order. A few seconds later powerful exhaust pumps began to

reduce the quantity of hydrogen in the ballonettes and store it under pressure in gas-tight cylinders.

As soon as the gondolas bumped lightly on the ground, six of the crew descended, holding on until their weight was more than compensated by the reduced "lift" of the hydrogen. Then, planting the flukes of the grapnels in the ground, they gave the signal for their comrades on board to heave down on the four holding cables.

More gas was then pumped from the envelope to neutralise the weight of the portly ex-members of the Paraquilan Government; for until this was done the shanghaied men would not be set ashore.

Ordering half a dozen of the crew to act as armed guards, Cain, accompanied by Kayburn and Barnard, went to the door of the gondola in which ex-President Bramo and his companions were secured.

"Listen carefully to what I have to say, General Poseda!" he exclaimed, addressing the only English-speaking member of the party. "Bromo and the others will come to no harm if they carry out my orders. I suppose you are aware that they were carried off under the orders of the Provisional Government of Paraquil del Norte? You are not? Well, you know now. First, tell your companions to throw their firearms out of the scuttle. They may retain their swords; but if I find any other weapon amongst you, look out for squalls. You don't know what that means? Sorry, I'd forgotten you aren't a sailor. In other words, do as you're told or there'll be trouble."

Poseda conveyed the gist of this order to his companions, and presently a number of firearms were projected through the open scuttle on to the ground, where one of the airship's crew collected them and placed them on board again.

The door was then unlocked and the prisoners were told to come out at half-minute intervals. Looking sullen and downcast they emerged until Poseda alone was left. No doubt their feelings were those of relief when they found their feet touching solid ground, but they were still in the dark as to where they were.

Cain asked Kayburn to explain. The airman did so, adding that the town of Hujas was only thirty kilometres away, and that if they stepped out smartly they ought to be there by sunset.

"Belay there a minute, Kayburn!" interrupted Cain. "Sorry to butt in, but I can't see friend Poseda. I'll fetch him along."

Going to the gondola, at the door of which armed guards were still posted, the pirate captain ordered Poseda to come out.

The general obeyed, grinning inanely.

"It's all right, Captain Trevor!" he exclaimed mysteriously. "It's a very smart piece of work this coup of yours. Of course I know that to allay suspicion you have to include me. I don't mind. We are now able to resume our voyage with our respective treasure."

"Are we?" rejoined Cain in cold, cutting tones that made Poseda recoil. "Are we? Is that how you obey my orders? Line up with the rest this instant!"

"But, señor——"

"This instant!" thundered the pirate captain.

The wretched Poseda skipped to the ladder, moving quicker than he had done for years, fell on his hands upon the ground, recovered himself and ran to take his place by the side of his companions in misfortune to the accompaniment of roars of laughter from the crew of the airship.

Cain held up his hand. The levity died away. Although the Paraquilan airmen were ignorant of English, the gesture of the pirate captain needed no interpreter.

"Now, Mr. Kayburn!" he began. "I am about to deliver a short speech. If you will kindly translate for the benefit of the native crew, and General Poseda will do the same to enlighten the ex-President, I will begin.

"I came to Bomanares with the intention of helping Paraquil against her enemies. As a practical proof I brought a cargo of munitions, which the Minister of War was very pleased to receive. For the cargo I was paid fifty thousand dollars, part of which I apportioned amongst my crew. I will say nothing further concerning General Poseda's suggestion to me. Unless he reveals to his companions in robbery or they counsel him to do so, the matter ends by the officers and crew of this airship being the richer by a hundred thousand dollars.

"But what I particularly want to point out is the circumstances that compelled me to kidnap the Government of Paraquil, observing that the act was sanctioned by the provisional President, Pedro Aquillo. I discovered from reliable sources that it was the intention of these gentlemen (looking in the direction of Bramo and his companions) to let my men and me risk our lives for the Republic; then, should Ouro Preto and Banda Rica be defeated, I was to be conveniently put out of the way, and the fifty thousand dollars would be taken by the President and his Ministers. That state of affairs I mean to alter. I hope to make, and I feel certain I shall succeed, the Republic of Paraquil del Norte a State fit for honest men. That is all. You are dismissed. Thank your lucky stars, ex-President Lippo Bramo & Co., that you've a white man to deal with."

Cain expected angry and indignant protests. There were none. The members of the late Government turned and hurried away.

“Now, this applies to all hands,” announced the pirate captain after the shanghaied officials had disappeared. “The hundred thousand dollars forming part of the illegally obtained hoard of General Poseda will be distributed as follows, as soon as we are up again. I take twenty thousand; a similar sum will be allotted to Mr. Kayburn. To Mr. Barnard will be handed ten thousand dollars. The remainder, fifty thousand dollars, will be divided equally between the hands, British and Paraquilan alike.”

Checking a demonstration of joy on the part of Barnard, Davidge and Cross, the pirate captain requested Kayburn to translate. When he had done so the enthusiasm was unbounded.

Cain let the men give vent to their exuberance, then he gave orders for the airship to get under way again.

“Thanks awfully, Mr. Trevor!” said Kayburn, when at the first favourable moment the two were able to exchange words. “But, I say, aren’t we helping ourselves rather—rather——”

He broke off, unable to frame the thought in his mind.

“Yes, we are, rather,” added Cain. “But if you never have anything weightier on your conscience you’re decidedly lucky, old son.”

“It was rather a smart move, that of yours, sir,” continued Kayburn—“finding out all about Bramo’s intention to do you in and collar the money.”

“’S’pose it was,” agreed Cain. “As a matter of fact, it was pure guesswork on my part, and, judging by the way those greasy rogues took it, I wasn’t far out.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### “JUDAS!”

Without any outstanding incidents the airship arrived at her destination, the sheds at Sorbombo. According to recently-passed regulations relating to the attitude of neutrals towards aircraft of nations at war, the Paraquilan airship was permitted to remain forty-eight hours on Brazilian territory and to take in what fuel and hydrogen she required to enable her to continue her flight. If, at the expiration of the period of grace, the airship could not or would not resume her voyage internment would follow automatically.

Already the silver dollars had been apportioned, and the task was to place them in safe keeping. Since Cain and Kayburn could not both leave the airship at the same time, the airman asked the pirate captain to deposit his share in a bank in Bahia.

Hiring a powerful motor and taking Barnard, Davidge and Cross as armed escort, Cain took the silver into Bahia and drove straight to Dom Saldanha's bank.

Years ago Cain had had transactions with the firm. That was when he was a junior-lieutenant on one of the ships of the British South American and West Indies squadron; and it was hardly likely that Saldanha would recognise his client as such.

The pirate captain acted perfectly honourably with his men. He saw that Barnard and the others deposited most of their shares and received the necessary receipt; carried out Kayburn's request as to the deposit of his twenty thousand dollars; and then he paid in practically the whole of the money he had retained for himself out of the proceeds of the *Nike*'s cargo and of his share of Poseda's hoard.

This done, he requested to be shown into Dom Saldanha's private room.

“Good day, señor——” exclaimed the Principal, glancing over his spectacles at a slip of paper on which Cain had written his present assumed name. “Ah! Dom Trevor. Remarkable! Only a matter of minutes since, an Englishman was inquiring for a Señor Trevorrick. Perchance he made a slight mistake in your name, and wished to arrange an interview?”

This information caused Cain furiously to think. Evidently some one had a well-founded idea that the captain of the pirate submarine *Alerte* had not perished with his command; but who? Not for one moment did he imagine the person referred to to be Pengelly; he was serving a life-sentence. Nor could it very well be any of the crew for similar reasons. But on further consideration it might be some one sent out to Bahia on Pengelly's information, since Cain had stated that he was about to transfer a portion of his ill-gotten booty to the care of Dom Saldanha—a proposal

that he had no idea of carrying out.

Keeping his features under perfect control, Cain shook his head.

"I am afraid the business that brought your late client here has nothing to do with me," he replied. "What was the person's name? Or is it a breach of confidence to reveal that information?"

"Not at all," answered Saldanha. "As a matter of fact, no business resulted. The caller gave the name of Captain Solomon Tuke."

"Never heard of him," declared Cain emphatically. "Now, señor, if you will be so kind as to favour me with your attention."

For the next twenty minutes the two men discussed the matter of investments, and having accepted Saldanha's proposals, Cain took his leave.

His next step was to order dinner for his companions, leaving them in a café while he went to an hotel which he knew to be rarely used by British visitors to this Brazilian port. He had no wish to fall across any one likely to recognise him, but he had a strange yearning to see an English newspaper.

A waiter handed him a couple of papers. They had been published in London three weeks previously. Scanning these, Cain could not help realising how hopelessly he had lost touch with events at home. References to things that had taken place and were familiar to millions of Britons all over the world were baffling mysteries as far as he was concerned.

"I can understand old Rip Van Winkle's perplexity now, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "What wouldn't I give to have a holiday in London!"

Presently his interest quickened at the heading—"Echo of the *Alerte* case." It was a report of an inquest held at Okehampton on the decomposed body of a man in convict's clothes, and went on to say that the corpse had been identified as that of Paul Pengelly, late second in command of the pirate submarine *Alerte* who had effected his escape from Dartmoor a month ago while undergoing a life-sentence.

"I wonder," mused Cain. "That blighter was a cunning rogue. I wouldn't be satisfied that he's dead until I've seen him in his coffin. Now, if Pengelly has thrown off pursuit, he'll probably make for Bahia to get what he imagined to be his share of the cash. That being the case, and putting two and two together, I shouldn't be very much surprised to find that Pengelly and that chap Tuke are one and the same person. That's unfortunate. Supposing he spots me? But, after all, he can't do much. He daren't denounce me, because he must know that he'll be liable to extradition."

Leisurely completing his meal, Cain paid and tipped the waiter and strolled out into the plaza, where he found Barnard and the others waiting by the car.

"We've seen that sweep Pengelly, sir," announced the bo'sun.

Cain nodded.

"I had my suspicions he was here," he rejoined. "Did he see you?"

"No, sir," replied Barnard. "We were sitting at a table and could overlook the street. Pengelly came along dressed up like a regular toff. He didn't look our way; in fact, he was keeping his eyes on the ground and looking very much down in the mouth."

"Let's hope he was," said Cain, with a laugh. "We don't want to run across him if it can be avoided, although he'll be afraid to say anything. But, on the other hand, if he's still under the impression that we are down in Davy Jones's locker we'll let him carry on with it. Right-o, lads! All aboard! We'll get clear of Bahia as sharp as we can."

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Meanwhile Pengelly, his hopes once again dashed to the ground, was pacing the streets of Bahia, and racking his brains over the problem of existence. He had yet to face the wrath of the Jew who had given him shelter, found him clothes and provided money to enable him to present himself to Señor Saldanha as a co-partner of the deceased Thomas Trevorrick. It was more than likely the Jew would prosecute him as a person guilty of obtaining goods by fraudulent misrepresentation, and Pengelly had no desire to make the acquaintance of another prison—and a Brazilian one at that. The obvious way out of the difficulty was to decamp; but there again the problem arose: where could he go? He had not sufficient money to pay for a long railway journey; he dare not attempt to find a berth on a British or a Yankee vessel, and he was most reluctant to ship aboard a craft officered and manned by non-English-speaking men.

In this downcast mood he passed within ten yards of Barnard and his two companions, and made his way to one of the quays.

Here, as luck would have it, a man, drawing the correct conclusion that here was a foreigner down on his luck, handed Pengelly a printed slip of paper. On it, in a weird jargon supposed to be English, was a call for volunteers for the Army of Paraquil del Norte now at war with Banda Rica and Ouro Preto.

"Ver fine chance for ze aventurer, señor," remarked the agent wheedlingly.

Pengelly considered the matter in his usual, indecisive manner, could not make up his mind to accept the invitation or to decline it. He was adventurous by nature, yet he hadn't any desire to be a target for hostile riflemen; he wanted money, wondered whether there was any chance of making it quickly as a foreign volunteer; decided that he could not make his way south with only ten milreis in his possession, and said so.

"That is of no deefeeccultee, señor," prompted the agent, whose incentive was the Brazilian equivalent to ten English pounds for every likely recruit he obtained. He did not think it necessary to add that there was a thousand-to-one chance of anybody getting through the hostile lines around Bomanares; but Pengelly did, adding that he had been paid off from an oil-tanker that was under orders for Bomanares and that his skipper didn't place much hope on being able to run the blockade.

"Again there is no deefeeccultee, señor," continued the plausible agent. "But a few minutes ago I speak wid a man who was motor-driver to de Paraquilan officers. He tell me Paraquil airsheel am ober at Sorbombo, an' officeers dey are 'ere in Bahia. Dy give you passage to Bomanares, see?"

"Right-o, old son!" replied Pengelly recklessly. "Where is the car?"

"Von minute," exclaimed the man. "Der is formality to undertake. Come dis way an' sign papaire."

Pengelly followed him into a sort of office, carelessly put his assumed signature to a form without which the agent could not claim the capitulation fee, and was directed to a certain plaza there to inquire for Manuel Paz, the chauffeur to the Paraquilan officers.

"Tany rate, if they give me a lift to Sorbombo, I'm well clear of that Jew," thought Pengelly, as he hurried in the direction of the plaza. "If I change my mind and get left behind, then I'm no worse off than I am at present, so here goes."

The approach to the square was through a narrow lane which ran into the north side of the plaza. Consequently Pengelly came out on the shady side of the place where a porticoed building cast a sombre shadow on the pavement. Right in the full glare of the sun was the only car to be seen.

Suddenly Pengelly "brought up all standing," with his eyes starting out of his head, for by the side of the vehicle were the men whom he had every reason to believe were rotting on the bed of Bahia Arenas—Davidge, Cross, Barnard the bo'sun and Captain Cain.

Recoiling, Pengelly took refuge behind a stone pillar. Hardly able to realise that his eyesight was not at fault, he waited and watched. He had made no mistake: there were his old shipmates very much alive.

Presently the car moved away, leaving the would-be recruit for the Paraquil del Norte Army standing under the shady portico.

"I'll get even with him yet," muttered Pengelly, shaking his fist in the direction of the now out-of-sight Captain Cain. "It's no use my tackling him and getting him to pay up if I keep my mouth shut. He'd more than likely plug me with an automatic pistol bullet. Nasty customer to tackle is Cain! No; that's no go. Well, thank

goodness he didn't spot me. . . . Ah! I've an idea—a regular topping brainwave; so here goes."

A few minutes later Pengelly took a table at an open-air café, ordered writing material and a bottle of wine, then after brief deliberation he wrote as follows:

"BAHIA, BRAZIL.

"SIR,—I feel it my duty as a Briton and a patriot to inform you that Thomas Trevorrick, otherwise known as Captain Cain, late of the pirate submarine *Alerte*, is alive, as are three of his crew, namely, Barnard (boatswain of the ship), Davidge and Cross. I have just seen them in this city and have found out that they are in the service of the Army of Paraquil del Norte.

"When you act upon this information and cause the pirates to be handed over to the British Government, I request that the reward offered for their apprehension will be paid me, c/o Banqua Nacionale, Calle Balmaceda, Bahia.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your humble and respectful servant,

SOLOMON TUKE.

"To the Chief Commissioner of Police,  
Scotland Yard,  
London, England."

## CHAPTER XV

### CAIN'S ULTIMATUM

"There's your scrap of paper, old bean," announced Cain cheerfully, as he handed Kayburn an official receipt for 19,500 dollars deposited with Dom Saldanha & Company. "A nice little nest-egg for a rainy day! With luck you ought to augment it considerably before this year's finished. How are things progressing?"

Kayburn took the receipt and placed it in his pocket-book.

"Thanks awfully, sir," he replied. "Things progressing? I've made it all right with the officer in charge, and we've taken in sufficient hydrogen for three months. We're all ready to get under way when you give the word, sir."

"We'll make a start at once, then," decided Cain. "I want to leave an ultimatum at Cordoba da Fe on our way south."

"Very good, sir," rejoined Kayburn. "I suppose you wouldn't care to stop at Hujas on our way south and inquire after the health of the ex-President of Paraquil del Norte?"

"I hope we've finished with that mealy-mouthed rascal," replied Cain. "It's curious how hard it is to shake off rogues of that kidney. Curiously enough there was a fellow in Bahia who played me a very dirty trick. I didn't see him, and he didn't see me, but three of my men spotted him. I shouldn't be surprised if I didn't fall foul of him before very long. If I do, by Jove, there'll be something for him to write home about."

Kayburn did not ask for further information, nor did Cain attempt to enlighten him.

"He's a jolly decent fellow," thought Dick Kayburn. "A thundering good sort; but I'm hanged if I'd like to rub him up the wrong way!"

Early next morning, when the airship was nearing the north-eastern frontier of Ouro Preto, Cain entered the pilot's cabin to relieve Kayburn.

"Let me know what you think of that?" he remarked, handing the younger man a sheet of paper.

It was Cain's ultimatum to the Republic of Ouro Preto, stating that on Thursday next the Parquian airship would revisit Cordoba da Fe. At the hour of eleven she would take up a position two thousand feet above the citadel. At 11.15, if in the meanwhile the Republican colours were not struck and a white flag hoisted over the building, the citadel would be destroyed. At quarter of an hour intervals other public buildings would be bombed until the Ouro Pretoan Government agreed to terms of

peace as follows:

(a) The blockade of Bomanares to be raised forthwith, and the troops of the Allied Republics were to be withdrawn across their respective frontiers.

(b) An indemnity, either in money, food-stuffs or raw material, to the value of 5,000,000 dollars, to be paid to the Government of Paraquil del Norte within three months of the signing of the peace treaty.

(c) Armaments of the Allied Republics to be restricted, and standing armies to be reduced to 5000 men.

(d) The armed forces of Paraquil del Norte are to be correspondingly reduced.

(e) No export or import duties are to be imposed on goods sold by Paraquil del Norte to Banda Rica and Ouro Preto, or *vice versa*.

"Think they'll knuckle under, sir?" asked Kayburn.

"They will," replied the pirate captain confidently. "The terms are easy. Five million dollars isn't much, considering the resources of the place. It will be only a little more than the amount of damage done to Bomanares during the siege. Yes, I think they'll accept."

The appearance of the Paraquian airship over the largest city of Ouro Preto was a signal for general consternation amongst the inhabitants. Before the vessel was over the outskirts of the straggling city the squares and streets were practically deserted. Here and there could be seen individuals whose curiosity or bravado was stronger than their desire to seek doubtful shelter on the ground floors of the large stone buildings, while one reckless man emptied his revolver in the direction of the airship that floated serenely a good thousand feet beyond the range of the relatively harmless weapon.

Unruffled, the airship maintained her stately progress—a fact that caused almost as much conjecture on the part of the inhabitants of Cordoba da Fe as the first glimpse of her had caused consternation. There was something decidedly uncanny in the way the Paraquian vessel passed exactly over the citadel and yet failed to take advantage of her position to drop bombs upon the place.

Opening the chute of the bomb-dropping gadget, Cain released three small parachutes at five seconds' interval. Each parachute had a tin case containing a copy of the ultimatum.

"Hard-a-port!" ordered the pirate captain. "Let's see what happens."

The airship executed a turn of sixteen degrees, slowed down and remained almost motionless over the ground, in the teeth of a twenty-miles-an-hour breeze.

One of the parachutes fell on the flat roof of a small building; another dropped into a deserted street; the third fell in the plaza in front of the cathedral. Here about half a dozen men were standing about, torn between curiosity to watch the airship and anxiety to take refuge in the sacred building.

As the parachute dropped they backed behind the pillars supporting the porch. Nothing happening, they mustered sufficient courage to look from a distance at the collapsed silken envelope. Finally one man, more daring than the rest, approached the parachute, holding one hand over his eyes as if that were sufficient protection from a possible explosion. Then gingerly detaching the tin case and carrying it at arm's length he proceeded to rejoin his companions, who took to their heels in a panic, leaving him standing in solitude in the centre of the plaza.

Quite five minutes elapsed before a priest came from the cathedral and inspected the case. Apparently the finder was unable to read, so the cleric announced the message written on the outside of the tin. Then, holding the case above his head, the man ran as hard as he could to the citadel.

"They've received that all right," declared Cain. "Bring her back on her former course, Kayburn. Now we'll see what our reception at Bomanares will be like."

Night had fallen when the airship approached her hangar. The arrival had been timed for an hour after sunset in order to avoid drawing the fire of the hostile batteries. On the landing-ground position-lights and powerful arcs announced that all preparations had been made for the arrival. A vast concourse of people, strangely silent, thronged the steeply-rising ground on each side.

But directly the holding-down ropes were thrown and the airship came to rest, shouts of "Where are the traitors? What has become of that coward, Lippo Bramo?" rent the night.

Cain held up his hand for silence, obtained it and then motioned to Kayburn to address the crowd. With almost perfect command of the hybrid Spanish-Indian language Kayburn "let himself go." He held the vast audience spellbound, save for hisses when the names of the members of the late Government were mentioned. Then, when he announced that on the following Thursday the city of Cordoba da Fe would be bombed unless the enemy accepted terms, enthusiasm ran riot. And no wonder: Paraquil had had almost enough war. She had been content to remain on the defensive, but when food supplies began to run low and starvation seemed only a matter of a few days; when her more-or-less trusted rulers had apparently left her in the lurch—then the acute nature of the situation dawned upon the usually light-

hearted inhabitant of the small extent of the Republic as yet not overrun by the armies of Ouro Preto and Banda Rica.

So far Cain's plans had gone well. The puppet candidate, Pedro Aquillo, had been successfully engineered into the Presidential chair; a Spaniard who had served as an attaché on the Western Front in the Great War had been appointed Minister for War, and by his initiative had already succeeded in creating a vast improvement in the *morale* of the Paraquilan troops. In addition to all this, the knowledge that they now possessed an efficient airship which had already demonstrated its capability to menace the farthermost parts of the hostile Republics; and they had the Englishman's promise that within the next few days Paraquil del Norte would be at peace.

No wonder, then, that enthusiastic shouts of "Viva los Ingles" rent the air.

Cain lost no time in making preparations for the flight to Cordoba da Fe. Fully aware that amongst the motley population of Bomanares there would be several miscreants who were not above betraying the State to its enemies, he made no secret of the grim task he had set himself to perform should the Republic of Ouro Preto reject the ultimatum.

The unfilled bomb-cases were taken with much ostentation from the citadel to the flying-ground, where they were charged with 700 kilos of high explosives placed on board the airship. Four machine-guns with men to work them were mounted in various parts of the ship. Stores and provisions were replenished and the intricate machinery and actuating gear overhauled and tested. Finally, twenty soldiers were warned for duty on board to act as ceremonial guards should Cordoba da Fe surrender.

There was one person at least in Bomanares who viewed these preparations with apprehension. That was the Greek, Basil Zaros. Following upon the involuntary flight of Almirante Mondez Gimletto there were two aspirants to the post of Minister of Marine. One was a native of Paraquil who now held command of one of the armed steamers; Zaros was the other. On account of his popularity over the successful engagement with the blockading gunboats, the Greek stood the better chance of the two. Apart from his well-concealed cowardice he was a good organiser, and if he succeeded in becoming Minister of Marine he would no longer have to take an active part in naval fighting. Moreover, he would be in a position to make money in certain crooked ways in which Greeks excel.

But now this roseate prospect bid fair to be overclouded. When the war was over there would be no need for a Paraquilan Navy; the Republic possessed no merchant shipping beyond a few river steamers. Consequently Zaros would be in that undesirable state known to seafarers as being "on the beach." He would prefer

that the war went on indefinitely. He even contemplated the possibility of crippling or destroying the airship; but lacking the nerve and fearing the consequences of failure he contented himself by uttering maledictions on the vessel, and on all on board her, hoping fervently that something would happen to make the attempt completely unsuccessful.

Just before midnight on Wednesday the airship started on her errand of destruction or mercy; that depended upon the sequence of events. Throughout the two preceding days the batteries of the investing forces had been silent. Cain regarded this as a good omen. To him it proved conclusively that the enemy were chary of provoking the airship to acts of reprisal. Nevertheless, he decided not to run any risks of taking the vessel up by daylight. Her previous ascent was an entire surprise to the hostile gunners, and before they could man their weapons the airship was out of range. On this occasion the day, if not the time, of her departure had been well advertised.

It was an anxious five minutes after the airship left her shed, as far as Cain was concerned. He realised that if the enemy showed any initiative they would have registered the range during daylight, and trusted to luck to shell the vessel as she was being hauled out into the open.

With hardly a sound and unaccompanied by the whine of enemy projectiles, the airship shot skywards as soon as the holding-down ropes were released. Not until she attained an altitude of eight thousand feet did Cain give orders for the motors to be started. Then, working up to a steady forty miles an hour, the airship headed for the distant city of Cordoba da Fe.

At daybreak, finding he was ahead of the scheduled time, Cain ordered the speed to be still further reduced; and, requesting Kayburn to have him awakened in two hours' time, went to his cabin to enjoy a well-earned repose.

At nine o'clock the hands, with the exception of those absolutely necessary for the navigation of the airship, piped to breakfast. An hour later, Cain "went the rounds" to satisfy himself that everything was in readiness, and that every one knew his orders. On no account was indiscriminate rifle-firing to be indulged in by the soldiers on board—a command that would be somewhat hard for a Paraquilan to carry out, since the general instinct of these men, whenever they have a loaded rifle in their hands, is to let it loose upon somebody or something.

The bells of the city were striking the hour of eleven when the Paraquilan airship, swooping down from the high stratum of clouds, hovered over the citadel at the previously-stated altitude of only two thousand feet.

No gunfire greeted her appearance. The national flags flew over the citadel, the

barracks and most of the public buildings. The streets and plazas were almost empty, but on the hills to the north and west of the city great crowds of people were congregated.

"They mean to defy us," declared Kayburn, who was standing by the controls that actuated a rapid increase of hydrogen to the ballonettes—a precaution necessary in the event of the batteries opening fire, in which case the airship would have to ascend rapidly to a safe altitude.

"It's bluff, pure bluff," rejoined Cain. "I'll stake my bottom dollar that they'll strike those rags within thirty seconds of the quarter."

"Let's hope you're right, sir," remarked Kayburn.

Slowly the seconds ticked away into minutes until the clocks struck the quarter. Cain, giving a quizzical glance at his companion, swung round and pressed the switch communicating with the bomb-dropping device.

The airship gave a perceptible upward jerk as the heavy missile left the chute. From the scuttles of the pilot-house the course of the falling bomb was invisible until it had traversed five hundred feet of space. Then it appeared within the radius of vision, turning slowly on its vertical axis in spite of the steadyng fans, as it hurtled with terrific and ever-increasing rapidity towards its objective.

A vivid yellow flash, a deafening roar, and the deadly high explosive had done its work. The airship, caught in the wave of displaced air, rocked, lurched and pitched in the midst of the dense acrid-smelling cloud of smoke. Deafened by the stupendous roar, none on board realised that the vessel had just been lifted vertically through five hundred feet of space, and then had dropped twice that distance ere she drew clear of the nauseous fumes.

For quite five minutes Cain peered in vain through the dust and smoke to observe the results of his stern messenger; but when the veil was lifted he was no longer in doubt as to the accuracy of the missile and the havoc it had accomplished.

The citadel, a Spanish-built structure, quite capable of performing the duty it had been called upon to fulfil in the sanguinary war of independence in the early nineteenth century, was not proof against the powerful bomb, however much it had been against the smooth-bore muzzle-loaders of the days of Bolivar and O'Higgins.

The massive square tower had been completely demolished, a pyramid of still smoking stone and timber filling the greater part of the courtyard that had enclosed it.

From the buildings surrounding the outer wall—a feature that had prevented damage beyond the precincts of the citadel—hundreds of the terrified inhabitants, who had taken refuge in cellars, poured panic-stricken into the narrow streets, their sole object being to put as great a distance between them and the public buildings

before the next quarter of an hour elapsed.

At precisely ten minutes from the time of releasing the first bomb, Cain gave orders for the airship to take up a position two thousand feet above the artillery barracks.

Suddenly Kayburn uttered an exclamation of satisfaction, and pointed to the flagstaff over the building. The national colours of Ouro Preto were being lowered, while a man stood by with a white flag ready to hoist.

"Thought so," remarked Cain. "Yes, the other ensigns are being struck. . . . Belay there, and secure the release gear, Mr. Barnard! It won't be wanted again."

The airship came to earth about a mile outside the city. Cain, accompanied by the men who had served under him from England and by the Paraquilan guard, made his way to the City Hall, where he was met by the Governor of the district, the Commandante of the fortress and the Mayor and other civic officials of Cordoba da Fe.

The Governor explained that he had received telegraphic instructions from the Presidente of Ouro Preto too late to prevent the release of the bomb.

"Were there any casualties?" asked Cain.

"No, Señor Capitan-general," replied the Governor. "The citadel had been previously evacuated."

"In that case the damage doesn't matter," rejoined Cain cheerfully. "The citadel won't be wanted again."

Waiting only to receive a formal acceptance of the peace terms, Cain returned to the airship, leaving the guard under the command of a captain to represent the Paraquilan Government until the terms were ratified and the indemnity paid.

"That's all shipshape and Bristol-fashion, Kayburn!" he exclaimed, when he rejoined the English airman. "Now up we go. We'll wireless the good news and then we'll make for Bomanares to reap the reward of our labours."

## CHAPTER XVI

### IN THE HOUR OF HIS TRIUMPH

Paul Pengelly was in the depths of despair. Six months had elapsed since the day on which he wrote to Scotland Yard, betraying his one-time partner.

He had heard nothing in reply. Although he eagerly scanned the English newspapers, which were to be seen in the Bahia public libraries, not a word or a hint had been given to indicate that his startling information had been communicated to the Press. That, he decided, was not to be wondered at; but he could not understand why the reward had not been sent out to him. Time enough had elapsed for Cain to have been extradited and brought back to England; yet the authorities, both at home and in South America, seemed to be doing absolutely nothing in the matter.

Meanwhile Pengelly just managed to exist. He began almost to regret that he was not back in Dartmoor Prison. There, although the work was hard, he was sure of his food. In Bahia he was not. Fear of a chance meeting with a former seafaring acquaintance kept him away from the quays. He had tried his hand at various odd jobs, even that of a fireman on board a river steamer, a task almost invariably undertaken by members of the coloured population of Brazil. He had toiled under a blazing sun in the coffee plantations; had driven a team of mules on a cotton-growing estate, and had been obliged to accept work that even a *peon* would refuse.

By this time his liabilities to the Jew who had posed as his benefactor had accumulated considerably. At first the man was inclined to believe Pengelly's story that, although he had been disappointed at being able to obtain money from Saldanha, there was a large sum shortly arriving for him from London. As time went on and the promised windfall did not materialise, the Jew took steps to recompense himself by other means.

One evening Pengelly returned to his squalid lodgings with 500 *reis*. On paper that looked a fair amount, but actually it represented a little more than a shilling.

Somewhat to his surprise he found that the Jew departed from his lately-acquired habit of reviling his unprofitable guest, and after supper offered Pengelly a bottle of wine.

"This to your good fortune, Señor Tuke," exclaimed the Jew. "In the market-place to-day a wise woman told my fortune. Gracias! She was certain that within the next few days a foreigner would receive a fortune and that I would benefit by it. Drink to the glorious days that are to come, Señor Tuke!"

Pengelly did drink. That was the last act he was conscious of for the next twelve hours.

He awoke with a terrific headache. His tongue was swollen and parched; his eyesight seemed blurred and distorted. He could not at first realise where he was, until the thud of a propeller and the erratic movement of the darkened hole in which he found himself announced the unpleasant truth that he had been drugged and placed on board a ship.

"That swine of a Portuguese Jew has made money out of me, after all," he thought grimly. "I wonder what he got for shanghai-ing me?"

His disjointed thoughts were interrupted by some one on deck shouting out an order. The words were in English.

Pengelly positively quaked. After his precarious existence in Bahia, he did not mind so much if he had been dumped on board a foreigner; but English!—more than likely the vessel was bound for a British port. In that case he would be very much out of the frying-pan and into the fire. He knew the patience and vigilance of the police when hunting for an escaped prisoner, although had he been aware that the body found near Okehampton had been buried as his, he might not have felt so apprehensive.

Presently another fit of drowsiness overcame him and he fell asleep, only to be roused by the door of the cuddy being thrown open and a lamp flashed on his face.

"Out you come, right now!" exclaimed a nasal voice.

"What d'ye mean, dash you?" retorted Pengelly, with an effort to assert his position as a master mariner of the British Mercantile Marine. "What's the meaning of this outrage? D'ye know who I am?"

"Nope!" replied the man curtly. "An' I guess I don't care. Git out of it, you dope-slugged son of a gun!"

It was impossible to look dignified when huddled on a floor measuring four feet by three, and still under the influence of doped liquor into the bargain. Pengelly could now only blink like an owl and try to moisten his parched lips with a hot and dry tongue.

"Lay hold of his legs, Jake!" continued the interrupter of his slumbers. "I'll learn him, sure!"

The next instant Pengelly's knees were forced against his chin. With none too gentle a heave he was hauled over the metal coaming of the doorway and dumped in the alley-way. Nor was he allowed to remain and rest there. A powerful hand gripped him by the back of the neck. He was yanked to his feet and, aided by the application of the toe of a sea-boot, he was propelled into the sunlight.

"Here he is, Cap'n," announced the mate, who had superintended the new hand's progress from the cubby-hole.

Still blinking, Pengelly found himself confronted by a short, red-faced, broad-shouldered man in soiled white duck uniform and with a peaked cap resting on the back of his head.

"Say, what's your last ship?" demanded the captain.

No answer.

"Chock-a-block with dope," declared the Old Man. "Take him for'ard, Mr. Mate, an' souse him some. Then put him into the port watch and see that he gets busy. If he don't, bring him along to me."

"Look here——" protested the victim.

The skipper took two steps forward and shook his fist in front of Pengelly's nose.

"Jumpin' Jerusalem!" he shouted. "What d'ye mean by telling me to 'look here'? If you don't quit right now an' get busy you'll get more'n a look from me, you slab-sided hobo! Skip, I tell ye."

Pengelly skipped so hurriedly that he fell and rolled into the scuppers. Being in a favourable position he was well soused with salt water by all the hands on that part of the deck, until, looking like a half-drowned rat, the miserable man was allowed to recover his feet.

"Can you splice?" demanded the mate.

"Yes, sir," replied the chastened man.

"Then git an' cut out that nip in that there three-inch hawser," was the order. "If you ain't made a satisfactory job of it before eight bells you'll be feel darned sorry, I guess."

Pengelly went; remembered that he had not a marline-spike; borrowed one from a member of the crew who was engaged upon a similar task, and set to work.

Many years had passed since he had last done any wire splicing. The hawser was of flexible steel, and had been badly "nipped" as the ship was warping out of her last berth. Although his hands were rough with hard work, the sharp ends of the wires made the blood flow from a score of painful punctures, even before the preliminary business of cutting out the "nip" by means of a cold chisel was accomplished.

As he toiled, Pengelly sought to find out what ship he was on. Already he knew that she was a Yankee. The lifebuoys hanging from the guard-rails of the forepart of the bridge settled that problem. They bore the words "*S.S. Great Content, Boston.*"

"A floating lie from truck to keelson," thought the unfortunate man. "Where's she

bound, I wonder?"

It was now close on nine o'clock, and the sun, although high in the sky, bore almost dead astern. That informed him that the course was sou'west. So far, so good; he was not homeward bound.

Just before the hands piped to dinner, the mate strolled for'ard and inspected the new man's work. Evidently he looked forward to giving Pengelly a generous share of his extensive vocabulary, with the additional relish of applying his ever-ready sea-boot; but the task had been performed so well that the mate had not a chance even to complain.

During the meal—it was the best one Pengelly had tasted for months—the "darned Britisher" came in for good-natured banter from the tough New Englanders, and after trying to "pull his leg" by telling him they ware bound for Patagonia with a cargo of refrigerators, they informed him that the *Great Content* was putting into Bomanares Harbour *en route* for Valparaiso *via* Magellan Straits.

This information did not cause Pengelly any great anxiety. He was not at all anxious to come face to face with the man whom he had betrayed; he had a hazy notion that Cain was somewhere in Paraquil del Norte; or, now that hostilities were over and the Republic had no need for foreigners to stiffen the ranks of their fighting forces, the pirate captain might have transferred his activities elsewhere. It was Cain's blood-money Pengelly wanted—not the man. He could easily avoid all chance of meeting his former partner by remaining on board the *Great Content* during her brief stay at Bomanares.

Inquiries in another direction elicited the information that Pengelly's wages as an A.B. would be fifty dollars a month. That and his keep would be enough to enable him to save a fair sum by the end of the voyage, he decided. By that time the reward offered for Cain's apprehension (for although this was announced before the destruction of the *Alerete*, the declaration had never, as far as he was aware, been cancelled) might be forthcoming.

But there was another side to the picture—one of which Pengelly was as yet in ignorance. The Jew who had acted as a crimp and had placed the Englishman on board the *Great Content* had been paid the sum of eighty dollars; this the Old Man would deduct from Pengelly's pay, besides other charges for his kit which he drew from the ship's "slop chest." Consequently, if he completed the round voyage—a matter of three months—Pengelly would be fortunate if he came ashore with twenty dollars to his credit. If he deserted at Valparaiso he would be even worse off, for, owing to the frequent disappearances of seaman in South American ports, it had become the custom for only a small part of a man's wages to be paid him at the end

of each month, the balance being made up at the end of the round trip.

On the third day out of Bahia, the *Good Content* ran into a hurricane. It was the worst known for three years. The seas ran "mountains high," huge masses of foam-flecked waves breaking continuously over the fo'c'sle and flooding the well-deck, carrying away bulwarks, starting the steel plating of the 'midship deckhouse and generally playing havoc. For thirty-six hours the ship battled with the gale, steaming head to wind and never making a mile in the whole of that time. Everything had to be battened down, the watch on deck could not be relieved, those below had to exist in the hot, unwholesome air 'tween decks, and were compelled to hang on with one hand while they conveyed their food to their mouths with the other.

Shortly after midnight the hurricane showed indications of abating, but its "last kick" did the damage. A terrific wave carried away the rudder. The mass of steel as it hung only by the lower pintle fell athwart the swiftly-moving propeller. According to the accepted theory, the impact should have ripped the blades from the boss. The engines began to race furiously. It was not the propeller that had suffered but the propeller shaft. Fractured thirty feet from the stern gland the shaft had sustained damage beyond the resource of the engineers on board to repair. The ship was as helpless as a tin can drifting on the surface of a duck-pond.

Her head fell off, she swallowed in the trough of the enormous seas, lying right over before the force of the wind.

To Pengelly, battened down in the stuffy fo'c'sle, it seemed as if this were the end. He had a momentary glimpse of a dozen hands slithering to lee'ard, accompanied by everything that had not been firmly secured. The lamps went out. In the darkness men cursed, shouted, struggled frantically to get out of the jumble of humanity and gear lying in the angle formed by the fo'c'sle floor and the lockers and bunks that occupied the curving side of the bows.

The ship recovered herself, rolled again, this time to wind'ard, receiving a tremendous beam sea that carried away her boats on the port side and staved-in the engine-room fidleys. After that she rolled again and again, but with less heel. The hurricane had blown itself out.

Presently the dog-weary men of the duty watch were relieved, and Pengelly with the rest of the port hold went "on." Beyond clearing away the raffle on deck, they could do little. The ship was drifting helplessly towards the not so distant Brazilian coast, while her wireless operator sent out frantic S.O.S. calls for aid.

Just as dawn was breaking a medium-sized liner appeared upon the scene. With a choking sensation in his throat, Pengelly recognised her as the *Bronx City*, which, having been withdrawn from the West African route, was running between New

York, Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. Only too well Pengelly recalled the circumstances under which she had been captured by the *Alerte*; how, in spite of Captain Cain's assurances that she would not be pillaged, he, Pengelly, had wantonly broken the pledge, and had not only ransacked the cargo, but had insulted the officers and men.

The one chance lay in the hope that Captain Hiram Adams, the tough old skipper of the Yankee *Bronx City*, no longer commanded her, and that she now had a new crew; otherwise it seemed impossible that sooner or later he would be recognised by some of his former victims.

Slowing down a couple of cables' length to lee'ard of the *Great Content*, the *Bronx City* signalled to the former to send off a hawser, and that she would then tow the disabled vessel into Bomanares Harbour.

The captain of the *Great Content* leant over her bridge rails:

"Send away a boat, Mr. Sycamore!" he shouted, addressing the mate.

"Ay, ay, sir," was the reply. "Get busy, lads. Dump that coil into the stern-sheets, you; and you guys, man that there boat."

"You guys" included Pengelly. He had no option but to take his place in the boat. The second mate steered, four men rowed, while Pengelly paid over the rope which was to establish communication between the two vessels.

Once more fickle fortune favoured him. Engaged in his task, he had to watch what he was doing, so that he could keep his face down and his head turned away from the *Bronx City*. As the boat ranged alongside the ship the captain hailed her. There was no mistaking that voice: it was that of Captain Hiram Adams.

At length, her task accomplished, the boat returned to the *Great Content*. To the end of the grass line a flexible steel hawser was secured and paid out until the disabled ship was ready to be taken in tow.

This business was an anxious one. There was still a good sea running, although in the almost total absence of wind the waves no longer maintained a crested, broken character. Rudderless, the *Great Content* steered like a dray—sheering erratically, straining at and overrunning the hawser every few minutes.

At six o'clock that evening both vessels were safely moored alongside the wharf at Bomanares. Both captains went ashore, the skipper of the *Great Content* to cable to her owners and to make arrangements for the necessary repairs to be effected; the *Bronx City*'s Old Man to obtain oil fuel, for the heavy consumption due to the towing operations had almost depleted the rescuing vessel's store of liquid fuel.

Both were doomed to disappointment. Bomanares was *en fête*. The festivities

had just started and would continue for two whole days, during which time no work would be undertaken.

"It is the fête of the election of the new Presidente, señores," announced the Paraquilan harbour-master. "To-morrow, if the caballero capitanos will order their ships to be hung with flags, the Government of Paraquil del Norte will appreciate the compliment. Most certainly, señores, you should see the grand procession when the Presidente proceeds in state to the Government House."

"Darn the President, say I," grumbled Captain Adams' companion, when the two skippers were returning to their respective commands. "Guess I'll not dress ship for a copper-coloured gold-bug of a tin-pot Republic. Nope! Nuthin' doin'!"

"Make it a deal," suggested the skipper of the *Bronx City*. "I calculate the Paraquilan crowd won't be over-anxious to oblige if we don't cotton on to their one-hoss Thanksgiving Day celebrations. An' mebbe the bunting will be all the better for an airing. Who is the President, d'ye know?"

"Nope," replied the other. "An' wouldn't give a red cent to know."

As soon as the *Great Content's* Old Man returned on board, he was bearded by a deputation from the crew. As it was a national holiday, could they have an advance and a day ashore?

"I guess I think on it, boys," he replied.

Five minutes later a burst of cheering came from the *Bronx City*. Her crew had made a similar request and Captain Adams had given the required permission. After that the skipper of the *Great Content* could not well decline the men's demands.

Being Yankee ships, they were dry, and the men drier still with the prospect of unlimited beer and wine ashore. Those on the *Great Content* began to smarten themselves up in anticipation of a glorious spree.

"Ain't you gwine, Tuke?" demanded one of the hands, noticing that Pengelly showed no signs of joining in the festivities.

Pengelly hesitated. He was most anxious to indulge in an evening in one of the cafés, but he feared to run the risk of being identified by any of the *Bronx City's* crew. On the other hand, they most likely had gone to the grand plaza, where the illuminations were brightest and the attractions numerous and varied. There might be a secluded wine-shop nearer the wharf.

In the end he went off arm in arm with a couple of exuberant Yankees. By midnight he was as drunk as his companions, and the three were "lost to the wide" in a wine-shop in one of the principal streets of Bomanares.

Just before eleven on the following morning Pengelly was roused from his drunken slumbers by the sound of a band, the frantic clamouring of the church bells,

and a loud and prolonged fusillade of pistol-shots.

"What's on?" he demanded thickly, addressing one of his boon companions of the previous night.

"Guess it's that fool procession," was the reply. "Let's see anyway. Come along right here."

The Yankee helped Pengelly to his feet and led him from the room on to a balcony overlooking the processional route. Feeling pleased with himself and everybody and everything in his maudlin state, Pengelly gripped the rail of the balcony and tolerantly surveyed the scene.

Both sides of the street were crowded with sightseers armed with flags, streamers, flowers and confetti. Many of the male spectators were displaying their enthusiasm by discharging their revolvers in the air. Almost all the houses had four or more balconies: these were fully occupied, while other enthusiasts leant over the parapets of the flat roofs of the houses.

As yet the procession was not in sight. In a neighbouring plaza a military band was playing "La Paloma" to the delight of a hundred whole-hearted tango dancers. In the distance came the crash of the opening bars of the Paraquian national air, "Chuachinetto." At the same moment the guns of the citadel began to thunder out a salute.

A hush fell upon the multitude—a sort of spontaneous pause to enable it to recover its breath before giving vent to a roar of welcome to the new controller of the Republic's weal. The troops lining the route, who had hitherto been lolling about in the characteristic attitude of the indolent South American, threw away their cigar-butts and cigarette ends, pulled themselves together and awaited the order to pay military respect to the head of the State.

"Take care of yourself, Tuke!" cautioned his companion. "You'll be over that there rail in a shake."

Pengelly turned and grinned vacuously at the Yankee seaman. More than half-seas over, the preparations for the procession amused him in a childish sort of way, although he had entirely forgotten the real nature of the proceedings. He began to beat time to the music, found himself "out," and, abandoning his rôle of conductor, leant over the balcony again.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed. "There's the Old Man just below us. Gi' him a cheer, lads!"

The suggestion was not carried out, but the American, following the direction of Pengelly's down-pointed hand, saw that his companion was right. In a balcony of the first floor stood Captain Adams and the skipper of the *Good Content*. In his

befuddled state Pengelly did not appear to notice the presence of the man he had good reasons to avoid.

The band at the head of the procession passed, the musicians blaring for all they were worth. A number of horsemen on gaily-decked steeds followed. Next a detachment of the military and a strong force of civil guards.

Next came an open carriage drawn by eight white horses. In it sat a stern-faced, heavy-browed man in evening dress, with the broad pale blue-and-orange sash of the Order of San Custoval across his chest. With the faintest suspicion of a smile he raised his hat to the crowds right and left, while the troops lining the route presented arms, and the spectators yelled themselves hoarse with shouts of "Viva el Presidente!"

Pengelly stared. His eyes opened wider and wider, his jaw dropped. He could hardly believe his senses, for the man seated in the state carriage was none other than his former partner, Tom Trevorrick, otherwise known as Captain Cain.

Still under the influence of cheap wine and bad beer, Pengelly threw discretion to the winds. Had he been sober he would have taken care that Cain did not spot him; being drunk, he did not care if he did. In fact, he wanted to claim acquaintanceship with the man on whose head a price had been fixed—a reward that Pengelly fondly hoped to receive.

"Tom, ahoy!" he hailed, in stentorian tones, and unconsciously relapsing into the Cornish dialect. "Trevorrick, here! Whar be tu, Tom? Three cheers for Cap'n Cain!"

Cain glanced at him. The shouts of the inebriated man had been audible above the plaudits of the spectators. Without a sign of recognition the Presidente and pirate turned his head to acknowledge the greetings of the crowds in the footwalk on the opposite side of the street.

Others had heard Pengelly's shouts, amongst them the two Yankee skippers in the balcony below.

"Say!" exclaimed the Old Man of the *Good Content*, "I guess that's the Britisher we shipped aboard at Bahia."

"Sure thing!" rejoined Captain Hiram Adams. "Sure thing, again, he's a guy I've been longing to boot for a twelvemonth."

"Guess my chief mate's done that a'ready," declared his companion. "Why youse so gone on giving him your boot?"

"I'll give him something worse when I get hold of him!" ejaculated Captain Adams, leaning over the rail and looking up at the balcony above.

But no Pengelly was to be seen. Suddenly aware of his foolhardy display, he had sobered sufficiently to make a discreet retirement.

“See here!” said the skipper of the *Bronx City*. “I’ve done you a good turn, haven’t I?”

“Sure,” admitted the *Good Content*’s Old Man. “An’ I guess you’ll not forget to ask a good pile of dollars for salvage.”

“I’ll not deny that,” rejoined Captain Adams, “but your owners’ll cough that up. ’Tain’t what I’m driving at. It’s the Britisher; he’s one of your men, ain’t he?”

The skipper of the *Good Content* was understood to admit that he was.

“See here, then,” continued his companion. “I’ll take him off your hands. You can sort of lose him, and I’ll give you two hundred dollars if you’ll put him aboard the *Bronx City* as soon as he shows up.”

“Mighty particular on a darned Britisher, ain’t you?” inquired the *Good Content*’s Old Man. “A’ right; guess you’re welcome to him right now for two hundred dollars. It’s a deal!”

## CHAPTER XVII

### A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

In the hour of his triumph Cain had sustained a nasty shock.

His plans during the last six months had gone smoothly. Having secured what appeared to be a lasting peace for the Republic of Paraquil del Norte he had set about to gain the highest pinnacle of fame that that country offered. Already he had mastered the language—had won the admiration and devotion of her inhabitants by his firmness and discretion in the affairs that had arisen following the declaration of peace.

According to previous arrangements, Pedro Aquillo, the successor to the Presidential chair left vacant by the involuntary flight of Lippo Bramo, had announced his resignation in favour of Captain-General Trevor, as Cain was known to the inhabitants of Bomanares. Aquillo was wise in his generation. In accepting the arrangement he realised that the shorter his tenure of office the better. Provided he remained Presidente for three months he could retire with a pension of five thousand dollars a year, according to the law of the Republic. Incidentally he was the first Head of the State to take advantage of those terms. His predecessors had remained long enough in office either to fall victims to the bullets of political or personally actuated assassins, or else had been forced to flee the country.

And now Cain ruled as Presidente Trevor.

Already, as the master-mind behind the puppet Aquillo, he had set the country on the road to prosperity. His power for organisation, his indomitable courage and determination to get things done, had resulted in a stability of government and a national spirit of progress that had already borne fruit. Foreign trade flourished; exports of raw material which grows abundantly on the rich soil of Paraquil rose by leaps and bounds. Internal communication had been enormously improved and developed, with the result that the warehouses and storehouses of the port of Bomanares were crowded with produce that found a ready sale in the old world.

Cain had not forgotten those compatriots of his who had helped him to the position he now held; but he was too far-seeing to put them into high places of State lest the jealousy of the native ministers might be aroused.

Barnard, ex-bo'sun of the *Alerte*, was now owner of four small steam vessels engaged in a good coast-wise trade between Bomanares and the ports of Ouro Preto, Banda Rica and Uruguay; Cain finding the necessary capital and handing it to him as a gift.

Davidge and Cross, also at their former captain's charges, were doing well on a ranch about twelve miles from the capital.

An exception to Cain's policy was made in the case of Dick Kayburn, but this was on account of the airman's service to the State. With the full consent of the Senate, he had been appointed Director of Postal and Telegraph Departments at a salary that enabled him to entertain hopes of returning home a rich man at no distant date. On that account only Cain envied him; there could be no honourable retirement in the old country for a proscribed outlaw.

On the eve of his election Cain was informed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs that a British warship was on her way out to Bomanares. This information was somewhat disquieting; he had no desire to have to welcome a ship flying the white ensign, although he reassured himself by the knowledge that the report of his death had been fully accepted by the British Government. As far as he was aware, no one, with the exception of his three faithful followers, had the slightest suspicion to the contrary.

"Why does a British warship want to come here?" he inquired of his informant.

"Because, Excellency, she is bringing out the new British Consul-General for Paraquil del Norte," replied the Minister for Foreign Affairs. "See; here is the announcement, cabled by Reuter to-day."

It was to the effect that the British light cruiser *Jutland*, Captain the Honourable Sir John Cardyke, R.N., had left Portsmouth on the 3rd instant to relieve H.M.S. *Inconstant* on the South American Station. She would call at Bomanares *en route* for the purpose of landing the newly-appointed Consul-General to Paraquil, Sir Peter Muspratt, and presumably the captain of the cruiser would pay a ceremonial visit to the President of the Republic.

"I wish I had a current Navy List," thought Cain. "I could then find out if any of the officers on the *Jutland* were—hardly likely, but, hang it! I shouldn't wonder if they didn't try to find out everything about me; when and where I was born, who my parents were, how and when I cut my first tooth and all that balderdash. I'll have to draw another cheque on the Bank of Imagination."

He went to bed in a bad humour.

The sun was shining brightly when the Presidente-elect awoke. The misgivings of the previous evening had vanished. He felt as bright and high-spirited as he could have hoped. He was on the very threshold of success—an attainment he had reached by sheer force of character, aided by the whole-hearted efforts of his little band of compatriots. Out of the chaos of a disorganised Republic he had evolved order and prosperity. He still looked forward to seeing Paraquil del Norte one of the

most progressive and well-organised States of the South American continent.

As he dressed—he scorned the assistance of a valet—he could hear the tinkle of stringed instruments, the blare of brass bands, the irregular reports of pistol-shots and the *vivas* of the multitude. Even at that early hour the inhabitants of Bomanares were displaying their enthusiasm for the new Head of the State.

At the prearranged hour, Cain entered the state carriage as the sole occupant. The resigning Presidente, Pedro Aquillo, was to follow in the next carriage with the heads of the Army, Navy and the Minister for the Interior.

“The bodyguard is ready, Excellency,” announced the officer commanding the Presidente’s personal troops, as he saluted and then tendered the hilt of his sword in token of fidelity.

“Let them precede the carriage,” ordered Cain.

“But, your Excellency,” protested the officer, “they are for your protection, and must needs shield you with their bodies from possible danger.”

“I do not think that any one will hurl a bomb at me to-day,” said Cain, with a whimsical smile. “Order the guards to ride in front of the carriage.”

The ceremony that conferred the title of Presidente on Captain Cain proceeded without a hitch; and then, amidst the plaudits of the crowds, the blaring of bands and the thunderous roar of the saluting guns, the Head of the Republic of Paraquil del Norte set out on his triumphal progress through the principal streets.

A bomb was hurled. It was not of a type employed by anarchists to remove the heads of authority, whether they be Emperors, Kings, Presidents or Governors. It was a raucous greeting from the lips of the renegade and traitor, Paul Pengelly.

Only by a supreme effort of self-control did Cain keep his feelings under command. He realised that figuratively the cat was out of the bag. Amongst the crowds who must have heard that bellowing greeting, there would be some who understood its meaning. As likely as not Dick Kayburn, riding in the third carriage, must have heard and grasped the significance of the words. If the secret were to leak out—that the Presidente of Paraquil del Norte was the notorious captain of the pirate submarine *Alerte*—Cain’s efforts to make good, all his strenuous endeavours of the past six months, would be undone.

He had to act, and that quickly.

At the end of the street, Cain ordered the carriage to stop. The guards proceeded for nearly fifty yards before they realised that the rest of the procession was held up.

Back cantered the officer commanding the bodyguard. The Presidente beckoned to him to come nearer.

"A man has shouted insulting words," he said.

"That is so, Excellency," replied the officer. "I myself heard him, but he spoke in a foreign tongue. I did not understand, or——"

He significantly tapped the holster of his revolver.

"Detach four of your men," ordered Cain. "Find the culprit and put him under close arrest. He is to communicate with no one. Report to me this evening as to where he is detained."

"Excellency, he is an Americano," protested the officer, who in common with most of the South American people regard citizens of the United States as individuals with whom it is unwise to interfere. From Mexico to Patagonia, Yankees are generally termed "Americanos" by the Spanish-speaking population.

"He is no Americano," declared Cain. "Even if he were, no matter. He has committed a breach of the peace on the soil of Paraquil del Norte. Find him and place him under arrest."

The officer saluted and cantered back to his men. A quarter of an hour later, Pengelly, wishing fervently that he had not left the *Good Content*, was in solitary confinement in a cell in the citadel.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CAIN'S DECISION

For the rest of that busy day the new Presidente, although he was kept fully occupied by receiving congratulations, attending a ceremonial banquet and making and listening to speeches, could not banish the haunting doubts that followed upon his former partner's ribald greeting. So far the incident seemed to have attracted little attention, and no one commented upon it to Cain himself.

Satisfied that Pengelly was safely under lock and key, Cain decided to let him cool his heels in a cell for a day or two before the culprit was brought into his presence. Curiously enough the pirate captain felt no resentment towards his former comrade. All he wanted to do was to muzzle Pengelly effectually, not only for his own safety but for that of the ex-convict. Now that the man had escaped from Dartmoor, Cain had no wish to send him back to lifelong imprisonment. Provided he gave an undertaking to hold his tongue and live in retirement in any other State but that of Paraquil del Norte, Pengelly would not suffer at Cain's hands, even if the hitherto well-preserved secret of the Presidente's identity were revealed.

Pengelly sober, he decided, would never have dared to utter a statement that would have implicated himself as well as his former partner. Pengelly drunk was a menace both to himself and others; therefore he must be protected against himself.

Next morning Cain received two nasty jars. It was Dick Kayburn who, innocently enough, gave the first.

"I say, sir!" he exclaimed, holding out a newspaper. "Do you remember that pirate josser who played Old Harry in the Atlantic last year, and was supposed to have been drowned in the *Alerte*?"

"I remember something about it," replied Cain, with well-feigned disinterestedness.

"Well, he isn't, apparently," continued Kayburn. "He is knocking about somewhere in South America. By Jove! I'd like to meet that chap."

"And render a service to humanity by shooting him at sight, eh?"

"Rather not, sir," protested Kayburn. "He's rather a good sport, I should imagine. Tany rate, he played a fairly clean game from all accounts."

Cain took the proffered paper, a copy of a London journal, that had only just reached Bomanares.

The paragraph under discussion was headed, "HAS CAIN COME TO LIFE?" and went on to state that some one had raised a question in Parliament as to whether the

British Government proposed taking any action in the report received from a Mr. Solomon Tuke stating that he had seen the notorious Captain Cain, late of the pirate submarine *Alerte*, in Bahia. The answer given was that His Majesty's Government had the matter under consideration, and, in the public interests, it was undesirable to make a statement at present.

"There's one thing certain," remarked the Presidente. "If Cain is in Paraquil he won't stay here very long if I have anything to do in the matter. You said you'd like to meet him, Kayburn. Well, if you do, you might let me know what you think after having made his acquaintance."

"Afraid I'll not get the chance, sir," said the other. "In fact, I'd rather not meet him if you're going to make it hot for him. He's a sportsman, that chap!"

As soon as Kayburn left the Presidency, Cain had to attend a levee. This was just over when a servant handed the Presidente a visiting-card.

"The Caballero Capitan requests a private audience, Excellency," said the man.

Cain glanced at the card. It bore the words, "Captain Hiram Maddox Adams —s.s. *Bronx City*."

Resisting the impulse to refuse to see the Yankee skipper, Cain told his servant to show him in.

Outwardly cool and self-possessed, but with a dry sensation in his throat, Cain awaited the appearance of the man whose vessel he had once seized under conditions of flagrant piracy.

"I'm right pleased to see you, President," exclaimed Captain Adams. "Shake!"

The greeting, given in English, left Cain under no delusions as to the American's ignorance of the true nationality of the Head of the Republic of Paraquil del Norte.

He took the proffered hand.

"Well, sir," he remarked, "is there anything I can do for you? I presume you wish to see me on some private matter?"

"I guess ye can, right now," replied Captain Adams. "Say, President, there's a man aboard the Ammurican ship *Good Content*, only he ain't aboard; he's in prison in this city."

"Really; and what is his name?"

"Tuke—Solomon Tuke."

This information came as a nasty shock. Tuke, then, was Pengelly's assumed name; it was also, according to the report in the newspaper, that of the man who had given information of Cain's presence in Bahia. Although he had seen Pengelly in that Brazilian city, he had been quite satisfied that the latter had not seen him. Now, apparently, he had. More, he had stooped to the lowest act of meanness. He had

betrayed his former comrade for the sake of a miserable sum for blood-money.

"And supposing your statement is correct; that Solomon Tuke is under arrest in Bomanares?"

"I guess, President, I could do with him aboard the *Bronx City*."

"But I understand he belongs to the *Good Content*."

Captain Adams gave a deliberate wink.

"President, we've met before," he said. "I ain't kickin' at that. You're a white man, sir, and when you took the old *Bronx City*, you played the game an' kept your word. I've got no grouse against you. But that low-down hobo Tuke—if that's his name—he's the fellow I've got to deal with, sure. I guess he played it pretty low down with you, before he looted the *Bronx City*, didn't he?"

Cain nodded.

"Wal, it's just this: hand him over to me, an' I guess he'll wish he'd never been born when he's aboard the *Bronx City* on the way to N'York and Sing Sing. Say, is it a deal?"

With his usual rapidity for coming to a decision, Cain reviewed the proposition. On the face of it this seemed an excellent solution to the difficulty. Obviously Captain Adams was sincere in his regard for the man who had treated him so magnanimously when the *Bronx City* fell a prey to the *Alerte*. Adams was evidently tremendously anxious to get hold of Pengelly, convey him to the States and there have him put on trial for piracy, with the inevitable sentence of imprisonment for life in the State Penitentiary of Sing Sing. Once there, Pengelly would be in a living tomb.

"Sorry, Captain Adams," replied Cain, "but it can't be done."

"Can't be done, President?" echoed the Yankee. "Say, why?"

"It's not my usual custom to explain my decisions," declared Cain. "I'll make an exception. Tuke, as you call him, is on Paraquilan territory. There he will remain until I think fit to have him conveyed elsewhere. I appreciate your anxiety to get quits with him; but, believe me, the injury he has done me is far greater than the matter of which you reminded me. So I maintain that I have a higher claim. Rest assured that I will deal faithfully with him."

The skipper of the *Bronte City* ruminated.

"Guess you're right," he remarked at length. "I always said that guy was a skunk, and that you are what you Britishers call a sportsman. Shake on it!"

A slight flush of pleasure suffused Cain's tanned and weather-beaten features. For the second time that morning he had been paid the highest tribute a man can secure—the compliment of being called a sportsman.

"Thanks!" he replied, as he grasped the proffered hand.

"And," continued Captain Adams, with the suspicion of a wink, "you can take it from me that I'll be mum as a mollusc over the business. 'Tain't for me to talk about a man that's tried his hardest to make good. See here, President, if ever you want help, and I can be of service to you, don't forget Hiram Maddox Adams of lil' ol' N'York."

Left to himself, Cain pondered over the situation. There was much to be done, and very little time in which to do it. Firstly, there was the question of what to do with the traitor, Pengelly. In the circumstances, Cain would be justified in having him shot; but he realised that that was too simple a solution to the difficulty. Pengelly dead, his troubles would be over. Alive, he would simply exist in a torment of fear—a far greater punishment than being brought to face the muzzles of the rifles of a firing-party.

Cain excused himself by thinking, "The swab isn't worth a bullet," but in his heart he did not wish to have his former partner's blood on his hands, although Pengelly would not have hesitated to have Cain's blood-money in his.

Within twenty minutes of the termination of his interview with the skipper of the *Bronx City*, the Presidente alighted from his horse at the entrance to the citadel.

"I wish to interview the prisoner Tuke," he said to the Governor of the citadel. "I will see him alone."

"But, Excellency," expostulated the other, "the man may be violent. In any case, let me place an armed guard outside the cell."

"I will see him alone," reiterated the Presidente, in a tone that the officials of the Republic had already learned to know and obey.

The door of the cell swung back. Cain deliberately locked it and placed the heavy key in his pocket. Then he turned and faced his former comrade.

Pengelly, who had been seated moodily on a bench, rose and backed into the farthest corner of the apartment. All his bravado had oozed out of him. With drooping jaw and staring eyes he literally cowered beneath Cain's supercilious gaze.

"Hello, Pengelly!" exclaimed Cain. "You don't look as if you are particularly pleased to see me. Yesterday you greeted me in your old happy style. Why this change?"

"I didn't mean anything, Tom," replied the prisoner in a wheedling tone. "I was sort of taken aback at seeing you riding in state. And being under the influence——"

"Of course," interrupted his visitor cheerfully. "Of course! Bad habit that; and, in any case, you ought not to have shouted at the Presidente, even though he were your former partner. It's not done, even in Paraquil. However, we'll say no more about it."

"Thanks, Tom!" exclaimed the wretched man, "I won't do it again."

"You won't, because you will not have another chance to greet me as Presidente of Paraquil," remarked Cain. "But, as I said before, the incident is closed. That brings me to another matter. What made you assume the tally of Solomon Tuke?"

Pengelly explained. His former comrade listened patiently as the other related the incident of the escape from Dartmoor, and his chance meeting with the dying seaman whose name he took. At that point he decided that it was undesirable to continue the narrative.

"Rather an ingenious move, that," remarked Cain. "One would have thought that once you got clear of England you wouldn't want to get mixed up with piracy again."

"Nor have I, on my solemn oath!" declared Pengelly.

"Sorry to contradict you," declared Cain cheerfully. "I didn't imply that you dabbled in piracy by act. You harked back to it by communicating with Scotland Yard, didn't you? I believe I'm not betraying any confidence when I state that a certain individual informed me that Solomon Tuke wrote from Bahia to the effect that Captain Cain of the *Alerte* had been seen there."

Pengelly's oily features became positively green. Whimpering like a petulant child, he threw himself on the ground and grovelled at the feet of the man he had done his best to betray.

"Get up!" ordered Cain sternly.

"Mercy!" howled the wretched man.

"Get up!" repeated his accuser. "Pull yourself together, man! I haven't threatened you."

"N'more you have, Tom," agreed Pengelly.

"Then, listen," continued Cain. "First let me remind you of an order I gave you when we commissioned the *Alerte*. You were to address me as 'sir.' Apparently you have forgotten, although as far as I am aware you never 'signed off' as second in command of the submarine. That's that. Now for the other matter. You did your best to betray me and the three who remained faithful from the time when you tried to assume command of the *Alerte*, and made rather a mess of it. I think you'll agree with me on that point. As a result of your sneaking communication a British cruiser is on her way to Bomanares, ostensibly to dump a consul into the State, but actually, I presume, to get Paraquil to extradite us. By us, I include Barnard, Davidge, Cross and you. Did that ever occur to you when you penned that demand for blood-money? On the face of things, it seems quite probable that within the next two months you'll be safe in Dartmoor again, and I fancy the authorities won't give you another chance to slip through their fingers."

Cain paused to let the dread significance of his words sink in.

"Why don't you have me shot?" asked the terrified scoundrel. "Anything's better than being sent back to prison."

"I'm not going to that trouble," replied Cain. "Why should I end your wandering Jew existence? I've made good out here; you butt in and bring down my schemes like a pack of cards. The fact that you've buried yourself under the ruins doesn't concern me. That's your funeral. All I mean to do in your case is to keep you here until I'm collared. I don't mean to be arrested if I can help it; but if I should be, you will be in the same boat. For the present, you're being kept out of further mischief, and provided you give no trouble you will receive none. We'll leave it at that."

Deliberately turning his back on his former comrade, although by so doing he recognised that Pengelly might deal him a blow with the stool, Cain unlocked the door, went out and secured the bolts on the outside.

So far he felt satisfied with his interview. He had left the wretched Pengelly a prey to the deepest apprehensions—a far greater punishment to a coward than actual bodily pain.

On the following day Cain attended the first meeting of Congress under his Presidency. His speech is still quoted in Bomanares as a practical step towards an ideally constituted and governed Republic. He dealt amongst other matters with the reduction of armaments, and proposed that the sole fighting airship the Republic of Paraquil del Norte possessed should be sold by public auction, since it was constructionally unsuitable for conversion to commercial uses.

This suggestion he carried without a single dissentient. Cain left the Senate House at the termination of the proceedings with his tongue in his cheek.

His next move was to get in touch with his three faithful followers—his former shipmates in the *Alerte* and *Nike*. To them he revealed the precarious nature of the situation as it applied both to her and them.

"The British Government has acted upon that swab Pengelly's information," he announced. "If it came to the point, I firmly believe that Paraquil would stand by her present Presidente through thick and thin; but I don't want to see the Republic embroiled in a row with Great Britain, so I mean to quit."

"And we'll go with you, sir," declared Barnard.

"As I expected," rejoined Cain. "It's rough luck on you fellows, especially as you're doing well with your respective enterprises. There'll still be time to dispose of your stock at a profit."

"When do you propose to do a bunk, sir?" asked the ex-bo'sun.

"I do not propose to 'do a bunk,' Mr. Barnard," corrected his former captain,

with a touch of hauteur. "When I go I will go decently: all fair and above board, so to speak. In about another ten days' time Paraquil will be electing another Presidente. Now, listen, Mr. Barnard. In a week the airship will be sold by public auction. I want you to bid for her, and, what's more, to outbid every one else. I'll transfer thirty thousand dollars to your credit; but she won't fetch anything like that amount. If I'm mistaken and she does command a higher bid, carry on. We must have her at any price."

Barnard and the two hands had been gone barely a couple of minutes before Dick Kayburn blew in like a young tornado.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," he began, "but I've just heard that the airship is to be sold. Is that a fact?"

"Afraid it is," replied Cain.

"Pity," rejoined Kayburn wistfully. "We might have kept the jolly old thing just for old times' sake, and have a joy-ride occasionally. Although I'm stickin' my job—and it's a pretty dismal sort of business—I'm still keen on the air. I'm hoping to develop an aerial postal service."

"We studied the question pretty thoroughly," said Cain, "but after careful consideration it was decided to dispose of the airship, since it would not be wanted for military purposes and could not with advantage be converted to commercial uses. So she is to be put up for auction."

"Dashed if I don't make a bid for her," declared Kayburn. "I don't suppose she'll fetch much. I could rent the 'drome, couldn't I, sir? Even if she didn't pay her way, I'd have an awful lot of fun out of her."

"Sorry to have to disappoint you," remarked the Presidente, "but she won't be knocked down to you. I'm backing a bidder."

"You, sir?" exclaimed the airman in astonishment. "Then, of course, I'm out of it; unless you have me to run the old thing for you."

Cain regretfully shook his head. He had taken a great liking for Kayburn, and the thought that he would have to say farewell, perhaps for ever, was a sad one.

"Look here, Kayburn," he said, "I'm going to confide in you. For the present I know you will maintain silence on what I am about to relate. After I've cleared out, that condition will be no longer binding."

"You're clearing out, sir?"

"Yes; resigning my office and leaving Paraquil del Norte for good. Circumstances over which I have no control compel me to take this step. You remember you mentioned that Captain Cain, late of the pirate submarine, is somewhere in South America?"

"The blighter hasn't been doing you a rotten turn, has he, sir?" inquired Kayburn anxiously.

"He has," declared the Presidente. "Have you ever met him by any chance?"

"Never!" replied Kayburn, with conviction.

"Think again!"

"I'm certain I haven't."

"I wish you could be sure on that point, Kayburn," said Cain. "But you're mistaken. You've seen him scores of times. You are looking at him at the very moment!"

For a brief instant Kayburn was astounded. Then he laughed light-heartedly.

"I'm glad to know that," he replied. "I always said Captain Cain was a topping sort of fellow. If you are he, sir, I'm——"

"Wait," interposed the elder man. "Wait till I've explained matters a bit. Remember, when I've done so, there's no one in the whole of South American who will know as much about my past as you will."

Briefly, yet without omitting any important feature, Cain outlined his career, his object in taking to piracy, his escape from the depth-charged submarine, his adventures on the Coast and across the Atlantic. Finally, he revealed the facts concerning Pengelly's treachery, and how the latter came to fall into the hands of his enemy and former partner.

"And," he concluded, "now that there's a British cruiser on her way out here, ostensibly to land a Consular Agent, but actually to get me extradited, I am leaving Paraquil; not that I am afraid to remain, but because I do not want to cause complications. I am not running away. I am resigning deliberately and taking my departure by airship. That's why I instructed Barnard to bid for the vessel."

"Rough luck on you, sir."

"It is," admitted Cain gravely. "But it's the fortune of—well, one can hardly call it War. I'm not the only one of thousands who hoped to make good and outlive a somewhat dishonourable past. Rarely can it be done. The ghosts of one's former indiscretions follow a man as closely as his own shadow. I cannot even offer the lame excuse that I was young and inexperienced: I wasn't. I was old enough to know better, and now I must pay the penalty."

For some moments there was silence.

"My giddy aunt, sir!" suddenly exclaimed Kayburn eagerly. "This is a bit of a tough proposition; but can't I chip in? Don't say 'no' until you've heard me out. I'm a bit fed up with things here. Why shouldn't I go with you? You've set me on my feet. If I don't do another stroke of work as long as I live I'll have enough to rub

along with. I really couldn't stick it here under another Presidente of the Lippo Bramo type."

"I don't think Paraquil will ever have another of that sort," interposed Cain.

"Well, any one but you, then, sir. How will that do?"

Cain considered the proposition. After all was said and done, Kayburn was a free agent. He was under no cloud; nor did Cain intend to revert to his illegal though quixotic methods of raising the wind, and consequently Kayburn would not be called upon to incriminate himself.

"You may find it horribly dull if you throw in your lot with me," he said. "I've made up my mind to carry on running straight. I do not intend to dabble in the political affairs of whatever country affords me an asylum. I have achieved my aims in Paraquil del Norte and placed myself in the highest possible position in the State. With the record I am content. Henceforth my intention is to settle down quietly—or as quietly as the internal conditions of the country will permit—and dabble in some sort of hobby; something, experimenting in aviation, mining or any old thing that takes my fancy. You'll find that pretty tedious."

"Not I, sir," replied Kayburn. "Aviation? By Jove! That would suit me down to the ground and up above the clouds, if it comes to that. Is it a deal, sir?"

"It's a deal, Kayburn," replied Cain gravely.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE JUTLAND'S MISSION

H.M. light cruiser *Jutland* was fighting her way down Channel in the teeth of a steadily increasing sou'westerly gale. Leaden seas topped with foaming wind-torn crests pounded against her knife-like bows and threw blinding showers of spray high over her bridge, riming the funnels with salt, and driving the oily smoke across the quarter-deck and far to lee'ard. Overhead dark grey clouds with ragged mares'-tails scudded across the dark sky. The wind howled dismally through the tautened shrouds, and shrieked over the top of the tightly-strained bridge-screens, behind which bent the oilskin-clad officers and men who cursed the atmospheric conditions in no uncertain voices. It was cold, bitterly cold, and even the prospect of sweltering in the Tropics within the next few days was no compensation as they envied their messmates in the watch below—the men “fugging” in the battened-down mess-deck, the officers foregathered comfortably round the ward-room table and enjoying their dinner.

But even in the cosily-furnished ward-room things were not altogether merry and bright. The King's health had been drunk by the seated members of the mess, and the port had commenced to circulate. There was no hurry to rise from the table. Bridge and other kindred amusements were out of the question with the ship rolling and pitching as she did. The fire in the polished brass stove was smoking abominably, the messman had not covered himself with glory in the serving up of the meal, although possibly the occupants of the ward-room had become critical epicures after their prolonged residence in the Naval Barracks; the newspapers were already twelve hours old; and most of the officers were correspondingly new to each other. In short, they hadn't shaken down yet, and were much in the same position as a crowd of new boys at school.

Presently a messenger entered the room and handed a slip of buff paper to the Mess President. Before many days passed, considerable interest would be shown in that scrap of paper—and interest that would increase with the length of the commission. As it now happened, hardly any one paid the slightest attention to it. It was the news bulletin received by the ship's wireless, and in all probability contained items dealing with events all too recent to arouse interest.

The Commander glanced at the paper, elevated his eyebrows in mild surprise and passed it on to the Paymaster-Commander.

“There's something that will stir your gouty frame, Pay,” he remarked. “*Tempus*

*fugit.* It was five years ago; or was it seven?"

"By George, yes!" ejaculated the accountant officer. "I always maintained there was a mystery about the affair. His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to grant a free pardon to Ambrose Gregory Alhampton, formerly Lieutenant-Commander, Royal Navy, tried and sentenced by court-martial to eighteen months' imprisonment." Well, well! You know him, of course, Commander?"

"In my term at Dartmouth," replied The Bloke. "I was away Chinaside in the old *Bellona* when the case cropped up. What was the mystery, Pay?"

Already others seated round the board were literally sitting up and taking notice. The Paymaster-Commander, flattered by the attention he had attracted, sipped his port, smacked his lips and started his yarn:

"It was shortly after the War," he began. "I suppose things were a bit out of the usual in the sort of stagnation period following the Armistice. Alhampton was a Lieutenant-Commander, just appointed a promotion to the *Cerebos*—the 'Old Salt Cellar' she was called. He was a queer sort of chap, was Alhampton. Had a temper on him like a tiger; never seemed to care a rap for any one or anything. But he could handle men. He'd picked up one or two decorations in the Submarine Service before he came to us; but in a large vessel he seemed like a fish out of water."

"Then he got mixed up in the Devereux forged cheque affair; in fact, he was the culprit, although I always had my doubts. He was put under arrest, and I had to act as Prisoner's Friend. Think I could be of any use? Not a bit of it. He pleaded guilty. The Deputy-Judge Advocate refused to accept the plea, and ordered one of Not Guilty to be entered. Even then Alhampton hardly said a word. I couldn't get him to make any statement. He seemed to be utterly bored stiff with the whole proceedings; but it's my belief he had some queer quixotic idea in the back of his head. 'Tany rate he got eighteen months, and was dismissed the Service with disgrace."

"Evidently some fresh evidence has come to light," remarked the Commander.

"Well, sir," announced the Navigator, "I came across Devereux at the United Services about a week ago—no, it must have been nearly a month ago. He mentioned that Gilderoy, the principal witness for the prosecution, had died that same morning. Devereux, you know, was always doubtful about Gilderoy's evidence. His theory—of course he hadn't any real grounds for it—was that Alhampton was tricked by Gilderoy into forging the cheque, and that Gilderoy had got Alhampton three sheets in the wind when the deed was done."

"Then it's quite possible that Gilderoy's death has had something to do with Alhampton's pardon," remarked the Paymaster-Commander. "Alhampton was that sort of chap. He wouldn't lift a little finger to clear himself if he had half of the silliest,

rotten notion that he didn't want to. Where is he now, I wonder?"

"I wonder?" echoed the Commander. "I've asked several people who used to know him. He simply vanished when his time was up. Probably a down-and-outer in some back-block. It'll be interesting to see if he shows up again after the proclamation of a free pardon. It's my opinion he won't. He's too jolly stubborn—quixotic, you said, didn't you, Pay? I'd call it pig-headedness."

Meanwhile an animated conversation on another subject had arisen at the lower end of the table. During a lull in the discourse the Engineer-Lieutenant-Commander appealed to the Commander to settle a point of dispute.

"Where, exactly, sir, was the *Alerte* sunk?" he inquired.

"Don't know," replied The Bloke. "We were chasing her in the Channel, but she slipped between our fingers like an eel. She went south, I believe. You'd better ask Broadmayne. He was in at the death."

The lieutenant thus appealed to, Gerald Broadmayne, had been a keen but silent listener to the conversation between the senior officers of the Mess, a tall, strapping fellow of six feet two inches. He had been captured by Captain Cain and had been detained on board the pirate submarine for some time, when he eventually made his escape. Later on, as sub-lieutenant in H.M.S. *Canvey*, he had taken an active part in the operations that led to the *Alerte*'s destruction.

"At Bahia Arenas on the West Coast of Africa," he replied.

"What happened exactly?" inquired the Commander. "I read the official report, but there were several details omitted that might have been most interesting. She was depth-charged, I believe, and a subsequent examination made of the wreck."

"I was one of the party who went down to search the wreck," said Broadmayne.

"And you found no signs of the pirate captain?"

Broadmayne shook his head.

"She was knocked about considerably," he replied. "No one on board could have survived the effect of the depth-charge."

"And yet there was a rumour—it actually got into the Press—that Cain was seen somewhere in South America," remarked the Commander.

Broadmayne made no further comment. He, too, had seen the report, but he had not connected it with the *Jutland*'s forthcoming visit to Bomanares. There were only three persons in the ship who knew that: the Consular Agent, who as a civilian was being given a passage; the Captain of the ship and his secretary, the Paymaster-Lieutenant. All three had been given to understand that this was a highly confidential matter, and that the strictest reticence and reserve must be preserved in connection

with the real nature of the light cruiser's mission.

And there was only one person on the ship who knew that Lieutenant-Commander Ambrose Alhampton and Captain Cain were one and the same person; and that was Lieutenant Gerald Broadmayne. He had held the secret from the first day of his enforced detention on board the *Alerte*; and now his silence on that point had become a matter for self-congratulation, since he had just heard that the "broken" officer had, obviously for reasons that proclaimed his innocence of a certain charge against him, been granted a "free" pardon.

It was as yet unknown to him that Cain was the present head of the Republic of Paraquil del Norte. Nor did he know that it was on account of his previous personal knowledge of the pirate, Captain Cain, that the Admiralty had appointed Gerald Broadmayne to the *Jutland*, so that should opportunity arise he would be able to offer conclusive evidence of identification of the much-wanted criminal.

From the time he went down in a diver's dress to examine the wreck of the *Alerte*, Broadmayne had entertained the idea that Cain, courageous and resourceful as he was, had contrived to make his escape before the vessel was shattered by the explosion of the depth-charge; but he had kept his theories to himself, not even letting drop a hint when called upon to make a report to his superior officer, the captain of the *Canvey*.

He realised that the situation, as far as Captain Cain was concerned, was becoming still more complicated. Assuming that the crime for which he had been convicted had not been committed by him, and that the Royal pardon had been given on that account, how would Cain's subsequent piratical deeds bear upon the case? Evidently the man had been driven by desperation, poverty and sheer ill-luck, as a result of his conviction, to take to a career of lawlessness upon the High Seas; and in Broadmayne's opinion it seemed very hard lines that Cain should be pardoned for one offence which, presumably, he did not commit, and yet be liable to further punishment for subsequent offences attributable solely to his unmerited sentence.

Broadmayne debated with himself upon the advisability or otherwise of communicating the information he held upon the joint identity of Alhampton and Cain. He realised that if the knowledge would prove a factor in the man's favour he ought to do so. Until he was satisfied that it was to Cain's advantage, he decided to keep the information to himself.

At midnight Broadmayne, clad in oilskins, sou'wester and sea-boots in addition to his ordinary rig, turned out to take his Middle Watch.

It was now blowing "great guns." He had to grip the hand-rails of the bridge-

ladder and hang on with all his might to prevent himself being carried away by the furious blast that whistled between the steps of the unprotected means of ascent.

It was a bitterly cold night. Hail and sleet drove almost horizontally against the lieutenant's head and shoulders as he sheltered as best he might behind the bridge-screens. The icy pellets rattled against the board-hard painted canvas like the noise of a Maxim gun. It was almost impossible to hear any other sounds. Even the shriek of the gale was almost drowned by the continuous tattoo of the hail and the *swish-swish* of some showers of stinging salt spray.

"Wish you luck, old son," bawled the officer he was relieving. "We're doing eighteen knots, course two, two, five. The Owner is to be called at daybreak. That's all, I think. Cheerio!"

The late watchkeeping officer disappeared in the darkness to seek oblivion between the blankets of his bunk, leaving Broadmayne to accept responsibility for the safety of His Majesty's property to the value of a million pounds, and the lives of every soul on board.

Occasionally as the light-cruiser's bows plunged into the creamy froth of the crested waves, Broadmayne could distinguish the hunched figures of the two "look-outs" stationed in the eyes of the ship, silhouetted against the light grey background. The next instant the smother of water would break inboard, completely obliterating the forms of the two men until the vessel again dropped her bows to meet the shock of the succeeding "comber."

"Those poor blighters have a shaky job," thought the lieutenant. "Mine's a soft one by comparison. Goodness only knows what they're placed there for: they can't see half as well as on the bridge look-outs."

A little later on Broadmayne found his thoughts reverting to the problem of Captain Cain. He could not dismiss the matter from his mind. Between the receiving of the reports concerning the condition of the steaming lights, periodical visits to the quartermaster at the steam steering-wheel, exchanging words with the engineer-commander with reference to the revolutions of the triple propellers and half a dozen other items in connection with the routine of a watchkeeping officer, the lieutenant's thoughts harked back to the case of the captain of the pirate submarine.

When he had been in Cain's power the pirate captain had not treated him any too well. In fact, he recalled grimly how Cain had threatened him with a "dose of the cat"; but even taking that into consideration, Broadmayne could not help feeling a certain amount of admiration and sympathy for the ill-used man.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE PRESIDENTE RETIRES

It was a glorious morning when the *Jutland* entered Bomanares Harbour, and, without exception, officers and men had their first glimpses of the capital of the Republic of Paraquil del Norte. Without the aid of local pilots she had found her way up the intricate channel, often with less than a fathom of water under her keel plates, and had brought up to one of the large mooring-buoys almost in the centre of the spacious harbour. She had saluted the flag of the Republic, and the shore battery had promptly replied, gun for gun; a fact that favourably impressed the *Jutland's* ship's company as indicating the smartness with which the little State was run.

"I remember back in 'nought twelve," remarked the Commander reminiscingly, "we put into a certain South American port that shall be nameless. We gave them the usual expenditure of blank ammunition, and the fort replied with three guns! 'Course our Owner got a bit rattled and sent ashore to know why his salute hadn't been returned properly. Hanged if half an hour later a crowd of gold-laced officials didn't put off to the ship, apologised profusely and explained that they'd used up all their saluting charges. Our skipper accepted the explanation, but added that international etiquette demanded the full return salute—gun for gun. The Republican officials were 'desolated'; so to take pity on them and to salve his *amour-propre*, our Owner sent ashore a seven-pounder and the requisite number of rounds to complete the salute. When the gun was returned to the ship the shore johnnies decorated it with flowers and sent off a thundering big barrel of wine. I got tight that evening," added The Bloke whimsically, "but I was only an 'acting-sub' in those days."

"How long are we here for, sir?" asked the Engineer-Lieutenant-Commander. "It seems quite a posh show. I'd like to go ashore and have a look round."

"Far as I know we're landing the Consul-bird and weighing at once," replied the Commander. "If we do stay a day or so the ship will be overrun with garlic-smelling shore-lubbers, and then 'good-bye' to all my new paintwork!"

The piping of the bo'sun's mate's whistle, followed by a hoarse order to hoist out the captain's gig and bring her alongside the accommodation ladder, was followed by preparations to "pipe the side," when the consular official left the ship to take up his new appointment.

"Seen the Commander's Order Book, old bird?" inquired Davidson, one of the junior watchkeepers, addressing Broadmayne. "Your tally's in it."

The lieutenant hurried off to verify the statement. To his surprise he found that he

had been detailed to attend upon the captain when the latter went to pay a ceremonial visit to the Presidente of the Republic of Paraquil del Norte.

Changing into the proscribed “rig” and buckling on his belt and sword, Broadmayne fell in on the quarter-deck to await the skipper’s appearance. As soon as the captain had acknowledged the salute of the assembled officers, Broadmayne descended the ladder and stepped into the boat; the Paymaster-Lieutenant-Commander in his capacity of captain’s secretary and interpreter followed, the Owner being the last to step into the waiting craft. At the quayside the order of disembarkation was reversed, the officers standing rigidly at the salute on the quay while a military band played the British National Anthem, followed by the official “hymn” of the Republic.

Broadmayne was rather astonished at the smart appearance of the officers of the Paraquian Army. They were well set up and alert, and looked very different to what he had been led to expect after hearing various stories of his brother officers’ experiences in sundry South American ports.

“I regret, Señor Capitan, that there is no Presidente to welcome you,” announced one of the officials. “Just at present the Republic is without a Head, and our late Presidente’s successor will not be elected until next week. It is all the more to be regretted, Señor Capitan, since our late Presidente is British born.”

Whatever disappointing thoughts entered the mind of the British naval captain, he kept his feelings under perfect control.

“Indeed!” he rejoined. “I am afraid, then, that I am the loser. I should have liked to have met your former Presidente. Did he meet with an untimely end that you should have referred to him as ‘late’?”

“Not at all, Señor Capitan,” the deputy hastened to explain. “He retired from office with the best of wishes from his colleagues, after they had in vain attempted to persuade him to change his mind. It was solely on account of his health that he resigned—owing, undoubtedly, to malaria contracted in another country. Paraquil del Norte is, as you are probably aware, Excellency, one of the healthiest districts in South America. Yet, somehow, Presidente Trevor found that it did not suit him. So he went.”

“To what country did he go?” asked the skipper of the *Jutland*. “Pardon me, but the facts you relate have aroused my curiosity.”

“He went north, Señor Capitan. No doubt we shall hear in due course the locality upon which his choice has fallen.”

“And did he go alone?”

“*Nombre de Dios!* Assuredly not, Excellency. Five of his compatriots

accompanied him. Three I know not the names of, and little of them except that they came to Bomanares in a sailing-vessel called the *Nike*. She still lies in the harbour awaiting a purchaser. Another companion of the former Presidente was named Kayburn, who during the war with Ouro Preto and Banda Rica was head of our Air Service. The fifth——”

The Paraquilan hesitated.

“The fifth——” prompted the captain of the cruiser.

“Although I do not like to have to mention it, Señor,” explained the deputy, “the fifth was a man with whom the Presidente did not appear to be on very good terms. Even an Englishman, I notice, has his likes and dislikes towards others, even as much as a Paraquilan. I do not know why there was a disagreement. The man’s name was Duke or Tuke.”

“Yes, that’s it,” supplemented one of the deputy’s companions. “Tuke, Christian name Solomaneos.”

“Solomon Tuke,” corrected the other.

By this time the British naval officer was feeling sure of his ground. He remembered that Solomon Tuke was the name of the individual who had given information to Scotland Yard concerning the presence of Captain Cain in Bahia. The obvious inference was that the informer had come south to Bomanares and had fallen into the power of the man he had betrayed.

“A most interesting man, Presidente Trevor,” remarked the *Jutland*’s Owner. “I should have liked to have met him. Do you happen to have a photograph of him?”

“Not a studio portrait, Excellency. The Presidente was so modest in manner that he would never consent to pose to a photographer. There are, of course, informal portraits—snapshots, I think you call them in England. I will find some and show them to you. Meanwhile, Señores, pray partake of the humble hospitality at our command.”

The Paraquilan, accompanied by several of the principal officials of Bomanares, escorted the British officers to the Presidency, where a lavish feast had been prepared in the latter’s honour. Portraits of former Presidentes adorned the walls, even the oily, flabby, loose-jowled features of Lippo Bramo being included, although the artist had executed his subject with remorseless accuracy. The only portrait that did not appear was that of Presidente Trevor.

“I will now endeavour to fulfil my promise, Señor Capitan,” remarked the deputy at the close of the repast. “There are several photographs in which our late Presidente appears.”

He gave an order to a secretary. The man went out, returning presently with a

large album.

"Here we are, Excellency," continued his host. "'The Presidente at the State Aerodrome,' 'the Presidente at the opening of the Chamber of Commerce,' 'the Presidente inspecting the 9th battery of Artillery'—these give quite a good idea of what our respected ex-Presidente is like."

The captain studied the prints intently, then he signed to Lieutenant Broadmayne.

"Have you seen this person by any chance?" he asked in English.

The lieutenant gave one quick look. It was quite sufficient.

"Captain Cain," he declared.

"Thank you," replied the skipper quietly, and resumed his studied perusal of the views depicting various incidents in the brief, meteoric and far from inglorious career of Presidente Trevor.

The gathering broke up after speeches on both sides, the Paraquilians welcoming the visit of the British warship, and expressing a hope that she would prolong her stay in order that her officers and men might learn something of the internal conditions of the progressive little Republic which owed so much to British initiative and determination.

On the other hand, the captain declared that he appreciated the hospitality of Paraquil del Norte, hoped that arrangements could be made for the vessel to remain for a few days at Bomanares, and stated that H.M.S. *Jutland* would be open to visitors for the next three afternoons from two till six p.m.

"That will make our commander tear his hair," he commented to his secretary. "I think I'd better give him three days' leave to go shooting up country. Broadmayne identified the ex-Presidente; I feel rather sorry for the chap. He's evidently done some sterling work here, and has tried to live down his past. It's a rotten job having to track down a fellow like that."

On returning to the ship the skipper sent for Broadmayne to come to his private cabin.

The lieutenant did not feel at all elated over the business. He realised now that his appointment to the *Jutland* had been largely influenced by the fact that he had known the captain of the pirate submarine, and that he was now being called upon to act as a sort of informal witness for the prosecution.

"I must ask you to draft a report dealing with your identification of Presidente Trevor of Paraquil del Norte as Captain Cain, Mr. Broadmayne," began the skipper. "In confidence I don't mind admitting that I loathe the whole business; but I have no option but to obey the instructions of My Lords."

"Very good, sir," replied the lieutenant quietly.

Already he was pondering over the new phase of the business. Now it began to occur to him that he might, without prejudice and perhaps with advantage, give information that he had for so many months kept to himself.

"Might I make a statement, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly; carry on."

"I have been able to identify Captain Cain, sir; but there is another matter on which I may be able to give information. Perhaps, sir, you have seen the report on the Royal pardon being granted to Lieutenant-Commander Ambrose Alhampton."

"The commander called my attention to it," admitted the Owner. "Alhampton was, I am given to understand, an old shipmate of his. But I fail to see what parallel there is to the case of the pirate Cain. Alhampton was found guilty of a charge of forgery—a charge of which he has recently been declared innocent."

"Lieutenant-Commander Alhampton, Captain Cain and ex-Presidente Trevor are one and the same person, sir," announced Broadmayne.

The skipper gasped with astonishment.

"Is that a fact?" he demanded. "Can you prove it?"

"Certainly, sir. I tackled Captain Cain on his identity when I was his prisoner on board the *Alerte*. He admitted it. I remembered him as a two-and-a-half striper when I was a cadet at Dartmouth."

"Then why didn't you report it?"

"From a Service point of view I ought to have done so, sir."

"Of course; then why didn't you?"

"I considered that Captain Cain was laying up quite enough trouble for himself without my raking up his past, sir. He seemed particularly raw on that subject."

"That is not to be wondered at," admitted the captain, dropping his official air, and talking as man to man over another's troubles. "After all's said and done, he played a straight game as far as British interests were concerned. He ought not to have run amok as he did, although with an unjust punishment and a stiff sentence worked out on that account he has some excuse. Apparently he realised his error after his escape from the *Alerte* (I'd like to know how he managed that, by Jove!) and has tried his utmost to run straight. Yes, Mr. Broadmayne, your disclosure complicates his case considerably."

"Do you think the fact that he has received the Royal pardon will influence the Government's attitude, sir?"

"H'm, 'fraid not. He's a pirate, when all's said and done."

"Officially he's reported as dead, sir."

"And, also officially, he's reported alive again," rejoined the skipper dryly. "I

doubt whether the crime of piracy can be wiped out. In olden times things were different. Henry Morgan, the famous pirate and buccaneer, was pardoned and given the Governorship of Jamaica; but I doubt whether any lawyer would dare quote that as a precedent. The only course I could suggest is that the Government be advised to drop the whole business and let Alhampton free to make a home in a foreign country. Fortunately the matter hasn't reached a demand for extradition yet. I hope it never will. However, you might let me have the report, Mr. Broadmayne, together with a statement embodying the facts you have just related. I'll use what little influence I happen to possess to urge My Lords to take a lenient view of the case. But, again, there are other countries involved: Germany over the *Cap Hoorn* incident; France on the affair with the *Surcouf*; Spain on the loss of the destroyer *Villamil*; and Uncle Sam over the seizure of the *Bronx City*. All those Governments will be out for Cain's blood. Poor devil! He chose an apt name when he adopted that of Cain: every man's hand against his."

"Not every man's, sir," remarked Broadmayne.

"Well, probably not," admitted the Owner.

## CHAPTER XXI

### TO THE RESCUE

Drawing up the report dealing with Captain Cain's identity was one of the most distasteful tasks Broadmayne had ever been called upon to perform. He did it, since it was an order; but he would have given much for some one else to perform the task.

On the other hand, his skipper's sympathetic views upon the case gave the lieutenant hopes that even yet something might be done by the British Government to extend the terms of the pardon granted to Lieutenant-Commander Alhampton for a crime that he had not committed to cover one that he had. Even then, as the Owner of the *Jutland* had just reminded him, Broadmayne remembered that there were other plaintiffs in this international affair.

That same afternoon Broadmayne was "on" as Officer of the Watch, a duty which in harbour mainly consists of wearing a sword-belt without a sword, carrying a telescope and receiving sundry visitors.

"What vessel is that, signalman?" he inquired, indicating a black-hulled craft with white topsides and deck-houses which was making her way up the tortuous channel to Bomanares Harbour.

"*Bronx City*, sir," replied the man. "She's flying Yankee colours."

"Very good," replied the O.W.

The *Bronx City* dipped her ensign as she passed the British light cruiser, a compliment which was punctiliously returned by the *Jutland*; then, easing down, she made fast to one of the wharves just below the Custom House.

That evening, as soon as his "trick" was done, Broadmayne went on the beach and, boarding the *Bronx City*, asked to see Captain Adams.

"Your servant, sir," exclaimed the bluff old Yankee, glancing from the piece of pasteboard in his hand to the bronzed, clear-cut features of his visitor. "What can I do for you?"

"I've seen you before, Captain Adams," said the lieutenant, "but only at a distance through a pair of binoculars."

"Guess I'm none the worse for that, Lieutenant Broadmayne," rejoined the other, with a laugh. "So you want to fix the cut of my jib close up, eh?"

"I was in the *Canvey* when you were chased by the *Alerte*," announced Broadmayne. "Naturally the incident interests me. I want to ask you for certain information concerning Captain Cain."

Hiram Adams shut up like an oyster.

"Guess you'll not get it," he remarked after a pause.

"That's unfortunate," continued Broadmayne cheerfully. "I had hoped that you'd be willing to say something in Captain Cain's favour."

"Reckon I'd do that," admitted Captain Adams. "He played a square deal with me. But why should I? You Britishers have got a knack of turning things t'other way round like greased lightning."

"Captain Adams," said the lieutenant earnestly, "I want to do the man a good turn. He needs it badly enough, Heaven knows. I'll be perfectly open with you. It's no use being at cross-purposes. Cain was, as you are aware, Presidente of Paraquil."

"And that the Presidente of Paraquil is the pirate Cain ain't no secret," rejoined the Yankee. "Seein' as I heard the news yelled at him when he passed through the streets on the day of his election."

"Possibly that information hasn't gone very far," remarked Broadmayne. "For instance, I don't suppose you mentioned it to any one in New York."

"Nope," declared Captain Adams. "'Tain't for me to blacken a man's character when he's trying to play the game. But why do you ask?"

Broadmayne related the circumstances dealing with Cain's career as a British naval officer, of his false accusation, trial and sentence, and of the subsequent granting of a Royal pardon.

"He would have been quite safe and doing good work as Presidente Trevor of Paraquil if some one hadn't given him away," continued the lieutenant. "A miserable blighter of the name of Tuke gave information in Bahia, you know."

"Guess I can put you wise a bit more," declared Captain Adams. "Tuke was the name of the guy who shouted out at the Presidente. I don't suppose that's his right tally. 'Tall events, I spotted Mister Tuke as the greaser who bossed the show when the *Alerte* took the *Bronx City* into Bahia Arenac, Cain being sorter out of it. A kind of mutiny on the pirate ship it were. However, when I heard the guy spout, I looked. Sure enough I spotted him as the fellow I had a down on, and I fixed up then and there to have him shanghaied aboard the *Bronx City*. I wasn't just that slick, 'cause Cap'n Cain had him nabbed afore I could get to work."

Broadmayne heard the information with considerable satisfaction. He recognised the fact that Tuke the informer and Pengelly the second in command of the *Alerte* were one and the same, and that Cain had displayed his customary initiative in securing the person of the man who had so grievously betrayed him.

There was yet another point which could not at present be cleared up.

Broadmayne had read of Pengelly's escape from Dartmoor, and how a dead body was identified as his.

"So you lost your chance to get even with the blighter," remarked the lieutenant.

"Sure thing," agreed the Yankee skipper. "Next day I called on the Presidente and asked him as a favour to hand the guy over to me. Cain thanked me for calling, but said he wasn't going to; from which I calculate he'd got something fixed up right away for the skunk. I saw it was no use arguing with a fellow like Cain. Guess you know what he's like when he sets that jaw of his. So I saw he'd first claim on the boob, and let it go at that."

"So Cain's got his betrayer in his power?"

"Sure thing; an' by this time I guess Tuke—if that's his name—will be wishin' he never was born."

"Cain's a man who——"

"Cain's a man," interrupted Adams. "No need to say more. I hope he'll come out on top."

"Exactly," agreed Broadmayne heartily. "Only I'm afraid his difficulties are not yet over by a long way."

"And I as good as told him so," said the Yankee skipper. "Also I mentioned that if he did want a hand to help him out of a mess he'd only to send to me at N'York City. He played the game with me, and it's up to me to give him a square deal."

"I suppose you don't know where he is?"

"Haven't an earthly," declared Captain Adams. "And if I did I wouldn't tell a soul—except you, Mr. Broadmayne. All I know is what you no doubt know already: that he cleared off in an airship with half a dozen of his pals—and Tuke. It's my belief they went north, but likely as not they'll get rid of their conveyance as soon as possible. An airship leaves too big a trail to be convenient, I guess."

On returning on board the *Jutland* the lieutenant reported to his skipper the conversation he had had with Captain Adams.

"If Adams is as good as his word, Cain won't have much to fear from the United States Government," commented the captain of the *Jutland*. "Apparently the only complaint lodged at Washington on account of the *Alerte* was the seizure of the *Bronx City*; and on that occasion Pengelly was officer in command of the pirate submarine. Unfortunately the same conditions do not apply in the case of offences against the French, German and Spanish Governments. Once the facts concerning Cain's identity come to light there'll be a holy terror of a bother with the Foreign Office. All we can hope is that the British Government can be induced to drop these proceedings—between you and me, Broadmayne, I loathe this investigation business

—and let Alhampton alone to settle down somewhere in the New World. Neither he nor the Government would have a moment's peace if certain foreign powers knew that he were in England."

On the following day a grand fête was to take place in honour of the British warship's visit. Sports and games were arranged to be held ashore, followed by a dinner to the officers and crew, the proceedings to terminate with a grand display of fireworks and an illumination of the city.

At six bells in the Forenoon Watch (11 a.m.) routine ceased for the day; the men changed into No. 1 rig; boats were hoisted out and steam raised in the steam-cutter and pinnace in order to land the guests.

At fifteen minutes past the hour the crew fell in by divisions on the quarter-deck ready for the captain's inspection before going ashore.

A bugle note rang out shrilly, as the Owner, accompanied by a group of officers in tropical uniform, appeared on the quarter-deck. The double rank of bluejackets and stokers sprang to attention with the knowledge that following a brief yet critical inspection they would be free for the rest of the day.

The silence, broken only by the trailing of scabbards across the deck as the captain's retinue followed the skipper up in front of the motionless ranks, was suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a signal-boy holding a buff "chit" in his hand.

The captain took the proffered paper, acknowledged the boy's salute and read the message. Then he turned and conferred with the Commander.

"Pipe down!" came the unexpected order.

In forty seconds the quarter-deck was deserted save by the Captain, Commander, senior engineer officer and the Officer of the Watch. No explanation of the sudden alteration of plans had been made, nor was one expected; but in an incredibly short space of time the "buzz" was all over the ship.

A negro revolt had broken out in British Noyada. The blacks, easily influenced by a negro agitator, had risen and were attacking the white planters and traders up-country. Already several estates had been fired and Britons—men, women and children—fouly murdered. The rebels, maddened by unlimited quantities of rum, were even threatening the coast towns, when the armed police and volunteers were barely sufficient to hold the infuriated negroes in check.

Wireless orders had just come through for the *Jutland* to proceed to British Noyada at full speed. Already the men were changing into working rig, boats were being hoisted in and steam raised for thirty-three knots. Semaphored messages to the Paraquilan authorities expressing regret that the proposed festivities must be

cancelled were sent off, and within three-quarters of an hour of the time she received her wireless orders, H.M.S. *Jutland* was steaming north as hard as her triple screws could urge her and with a long trail of black smoke belching from her red-hot funnels.

From Bomanares to British Noyada is roughly three thousand nautical miles—ninety-one hours' steaming at thirty-three knots. Meanwhile the drink-maddened negroes were burning property, looting and murdering.

## CHAPTER XXII

### TEMPEST IN MID-AIR

“What’s he going to do with me?” asked Pengelly.

Cross, temporary gaoler, eyed his former officer dispassionately.

“Ask me another,” he replied. “’Ow d’ye expect me to answer a question like that?”

It was the second day of the airship’s final flight from Bomanares to an unknown destination. Her crew consisted of Cain as captain, Dick Kayburn as second in command, Barnard, Davidge, Cross and three Paraquilan engineers who signed on upon the understanding that they would have their passage paid back to Bomanares on the termination of their month’s agreement. Also, but not as one of the crew, was carried Paul Pengelly.

“Look here, Cross,” continued the prisoner, “I never treated you badly, did I?”

“Don’t see what odds that’s got to do with the point,” retorted Cross.

“But have I?”

“Since you ask, I might as well say ‘yes’ an’ ’ave done with it.”

“When did I?”

“When you did the dirty on the cap’n, and peached to Scotland Yard,” replied Cross. “That did the skipper out of a decent billet and put me an’ my mate into a rotten hole just as we were gettin’ along all shipshape an’ Bristol-fashion, you dirty Jew!”

“I’m not a Jew,” declared Pengelly hotly.

Cross gave a steady glance at the full red lips of the prisoner.

“Pity you weren’t, then,” he replied bluntly. “I’ve no call to be down on a chap ’cause he’s a Jew. In a manner o’ speakin’, a true Jew ain’t a bad sort. It’s the miserable blighters like yourself what won’t own up to it that gets my goat. If there’s one thing to be said in your favour ’tis that you haven’t pinched a good Scottish name, an’ set up as a finansewer. But the point is you’re kippered this time. I reckon Cap’n Cain’ll have you sent back to England to serve the rest of your time.”

“He promised he wouldn’t do that,” said Pengelly eagerly. “Does he mean to  
”

“If I’d had any say in the matter,” interrupted Cross, “I’d have you swingin’ by your neck from this blessed airship. If the cap’n promised he’ll keep his word. His name isn’t Pengelly, nor Solomon Tuke neither.”

“What is he going to do with me, then?” asked Pengelly, reverting to his first

question.

"Better ax him when you sees 'im," was the only reply.

Cross went out, locked the door after him and left the prisoner to his not too comfortable reflections.

Pengelly was far from happy either bodily or mentally. Existence in a submarine had been a nightmare to him; a captive on an airship was even worse. He had a horror of heights, and although from his cell he had no ocular evidence that the airship was thousands of feet up, his imagination led him to conjure up appalling pictures of what might happen should the vessel meet with disaster.

Because he was not a man of his word and never hesitated to break a promise should it suit his purpose to do so, Pengelly was dubious of Cain's assurances that he would do his prisoner no bodily harm. Ever since the moment when "Presidente Trevor" had placed him under arrest, Pengelly was living in an agony of terror as to the uncertainty of the form of punishment that Cain was going to inflict.

Too late he realised that by his act of perfidy—his betrayal of his former partner—he had involved himself in the wreckage of Captain Cain's ambitions. Cain was still a free man and, judging by his standard of reckless courage, likely to remain so; whereas Pengelly had not only lost his liberty but all chance of gaining possession of the reward for the capture of the pirate captain as well.

Meanwhile Cain was revelling in the situation.

Bitter though the realisation was that he had been compelled to resign his position as head of the prosperous little Republic of Paraquil del Norte, he realised that his career was far from being finished. With a small but thoroughly trustworthy band of compatriots there was no knowing what high endeavour lay before him.

He was now a fairly rich man. His wealth was judiciously invested in sound concerns in various South American cities. If he wanted adventure there was plenty to be had. With an airship at his disposal he would be welcomed by any other of the South or Central American Republics when trouble was brewing either internal or against a rival State. Even if no fighting were necessary there was a big future for commercial aviation; while if necessary he could dispose of the airship to an aviation company and retire to a remote district where there need be no questions asked as to the past career of the stranger within its gates.

For the present Cain was in no great hurry. The airship was well equipped for a lengthy flight. Her offensive armament, with the exception of a pair of machine-guns and half a dozen rifles and automatics, had been removed. The weight thus saved was considerable, and had been replaced by additional cylinders of compressed hydrogen and supplementary petrol tanks. Without having to depend upon ground

assistance the airship was capable of keeping up for at least three weeks, and in that time the whole length and breadth of South America could be flown over.

One thing Cain had firmly decided upon: there was to be no more piracy. Piracy, he felt convinced, did not pay; and however circumspect he had been in choosing his victims, the result was not in his favour. Looking back, he realised that he was indeed lucky to be alive. It had been a mistake. He had tried, and was still trying, to remedy the errors of the past, but it took some doing.

He even regarded Pengelly's treachery with good-natured tolerance. There was little satisfaction in wreaking his vengeance upon a despicable man of that type. He meant to turn the fellow adrift in some district where he could do no further mischief, and let him live a prey to his uneasy conscience. He would be safe enough in any part of Latin America, provided he had the sense to keep his mouth shut concerning his unworthy past; and provided he was willing to work, Pengelly would be in no danger of starvation.

Cain's reveries were interrupted by Kayburn entering the cabin.

"Have you noticed the glass, sir?" inquired Dick. "It's falling like a hundred of bricks."

"I haven't," replied Cain. "What is it now?"

"We're at five thousand feet, sir," reported Kayburn. "At that altitude the barometer ought to be in the neighbourhood of 25·6 inches. It's now at 22·4 inches and still falling."

Cain went to the aneroid fixed to the cabin bulkhead. The reading confirmed Kayburn's statement as to the behaviour of the barometer in the pilot's cabin.

"We're in for something, it seems," remarked Cain. "What do you propose to do? I'd know how to act if I were at sea; but this business is a bit beyond me."

"Run for it," replied Kayburn laconically.

"All right; carry on," was the response.

Kayburn went back to the pilot's cabin. Presently he returned.

"We're in for it, sir," he announced. "Just come and look."

It was an awe-inspiring sight that met the gaze of the captain as he scanned the horizon. The airship was forging steadily ahead in a wide belt of sunlit air. North, south, east and west masses of lead-coloured clouds edged with coppery hues appeared to form an impenetrable barrier from earth to an altitude far beyond the powers of the airship to surmount.

Immediately beneath the vessel the earth was hidden by wind-torn masses of clouds glistening snow-white in the rays of the sun, but looking vicious and dangerous as they swept over the invisible ground.

To all intents and purposes the airship was flying in a vast lidless box, the walls and floors of which consisted of masses of highly electrified clouds that threatened to close in and envelop the flimsy gas-supported craft. In vain Kayburn sought for an opening through which to drive the airship. There was none.

"We'll have to chance our luck and climb," he declared.

"Very good," replied Cain calmly.

Manipulating the valves that admitted additional hydrogen to the gas-bags and adjusting both horizontal and vertical rudders, Kayburn began to increase altitude. He had a space of roughly ten miles in which to manoeuvre before coming in contact with the masses of cloud.

Apparently there was no help for it; the airship must force her way through some part of that wall of condensed vapour; but Kayburn hoped that at a high altitude the risk of being destroyed by lightning would be less than elsewhere.

Soon, however, it was evident that the airship was practically in the worst possible position: in the centre of the cyclonic storm. Overhead the sunlight faded as sheets of copper-coloured cloud shut off the rays of the orb of day. Denser and denser grew the pall of vapour until the airship was in an atmosphere resembling that of a moonless and starless night, save when vivid flashes of lightning swept athwart and astern of her track.

She was rolling heavily; pitching, bumping, and spinning in addition. To the crew it seemed as if the flimsy envelope was in the grip of a titanic hand that was doing its level best to shake the airship and crush it to fragments.

Under these conditions the propellers were doing more harm than good, for as the airship's nose dipped in spite of the pilot's frantic efforts to keep her on a level keel, the thrust of the screws tended to drive her earthwards. Conversely, as she squatted on her tail the propellers showed an inclination to keep her at an oblique angle.

Kayburn telegraphed for the motors to be stopped. The airship, now nothing more than a cigar-shaped balloon, no longer behaved so erratically, although she rolled and spun at the mercy of the furious and contrary air-currents.

It was no longer dark. Flash succeeded flash, the electric fluid playing on the moisture-laden envelope. The roar and crash of the thunder were continuous, completely drowning all other sounds.

Iron-nerved though he was, Cain realised a sense of utter impotence. All he could do was to hang on and grip like grim death. He could see nothing. The glare of the lightning was so vivid that vision was paralysed. He could hear nothing. He was dimly conscious of the acrid fumes of petrol and hydrogen; realised dully that there

was a leakage somewhere, and that it was a fortunate thing that the electrical ignition had been switched off. The while he recognised the fact that at any moment lightning might do its deadly work, and that the airship would then crash earthwards, a mass of fiercely-burning wreckage.

For how long this state of affairs continued Cain had not the slightest idea. He was in utter ignorance of what had happened to his companions. If Kayburn and Barnard were still in the pilot's cabin there were no indications of their presence. Of whether the airship was a hundred or ten thousand feet up he had not the faintest notion. He was barely conscious of hanging on with both hands while his feet slithered on the corrugated aluminium gratings as the storm-tossed craft described erratic curves in the midst of the thunder-clouds. With the knowledge that there was a leakage of hydrogen it was logical to conclude that the airship was losing altitude, but at what rate and to what extent remained an unanswered problem.

Gradually Cain became aware that the airship was growing steadier, that the flashes of lightning were neither so continuous nor so vivid, that the thunder, although heavy, was diminishing in deafening intensity. It seemed, too, that daylight was returning, although he was by no means sure on that point. To his sorely-tried optic nerves the light appeared much in the same way as it does to the eyes of a railway traveller as the train nears the exit to a tunnel.

Venturing to let go with one hand, Cain rubbed his eyes and peered into the dial of the altimeter. For some moments he saw nothing but a blur of violet hue, but presently he made out the needle of the dial. It indicated one thousand five hundred feet.

"She's dropping, sir!" shouted a voice in his ear.

"That you, Kayburn?" replied the captain. "Yes, by Jove! she is. You all right? Good: same here. There'll be an almighty crash, I'm afraid. Where's Barnard?"

"Here I am, sir," replied that worthy.

Peering in the direction whence the voice came, the captain discovered that Barnard was sitting on the floor with legs and arms entwining the pedestal supporting the motor-room telegraph.

Bending to the voice-tube, Kayburn shouted orders for the two emergency ballonettes to be charged to maximum pressure.

There was no response.

"Will you carry on, please, sir!" he exclaimed. "I must see what's wrong 'midships."

Groping his way along the cat-walk, Kayburn at length reached the motor-room. The Paraquilan mechanics were huddled in a corner, holding on to each other in

mortal terror.

Finding that it was hopeless to get them to bestir themselves, the Englishman made a dash for the valve controls. A gentle hiss indicated the release of the emergency hydrogen. Waiting only to close the valves when the pressure gauges showed that the balloonettes were charged to their utmost capacity, Kayburn returned to the pilot's cabin.

"We're lifting," announced Cain.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Kayburn fervently.

A few seconds later the airship was bathed in brilliant sunshine. The clouds had either discharged their super-laden moisture or had drifted away. Less than three thousand feet below could be discerned a vast expanse of tropical forest, while dead to lee'ard rose a mountain-range faced by a precipitous line of cliffs, the summit of which towered high above the altitude of the drifting airship.

"We must start up the motors," declared Kayburn, as the fresh danger became evident.

"Belay there!" cautioned Cain. "The whole place reeks with petrol and hydrogen. One spark will blow us sky-high."

Calling to Davidge and Cross, Kayburn hastened frantically to discover the leakage. It did not take long to find. A petrol pipe had fractured close to the union of the carburettor, while one of the hydrogen cylinders had been wrenched from its securing rods and by so doing had started the supply pipe.

The petrol leakage was soon rectified; in the case of the hydrogen escape nothing need be done. The cylinder was now empty and the fumes were rapidly dispersing.

"I think it's safe to start up now," reported Kayburn.

"And about time too," added Cain gravely, as he pointed to the wall of rock now less than half a mile away.

Followed another anxious moment as the motors revived into a state of activity. Then, gathering way, the airship circled eight degrees to starboard, skirted the spur of the menacing crags and, rising slowly yet surely, steadied herself on her former course.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### PORT BALLATOR'S S.O.S.

Considering the appalling nature of the ordeal through which the airship had passed, it was a matter for congratulation that she had escaped so lightly. Apart from the fracture of various pipes, a hole had been made completely through one of the main ballonettes. What caused the damage no one on board knew, but the fact remained that there was a clean rent on opposite sides of the compartment, as if a three-inch projectile had penetrated it without exploding on impact.

The loss of gas was a serious, though not dangerous matter, as it entailed drawing upon the reserve of hydrogen. Barnard undertook the repairs to the fabric, the airship being stopped for that purpose. At three thousand feet he was lowered over the side by means of a bo'sun's chair, and succeeded in making a gas-tight repair by the use of adhesive canvas.

Although the damage to the airship was but slight, the crew had been subjected to a terrific mental strain. Even Cain had to admit that he felt as limp as a wet rag, and Kayburn, the enthusiastic young airman, frankly declared that he "had the wind up," and wouldn't be sorry to exchange the pilot's cabin of the airship for the joystick and rudder-bar of a heavier-than-air craft. Barnard, Davidge and Cross were scared stiff, although their greatest anxiety appeared to be that of concealing their state of mind from each other. As for the Paraquilan mechanics, they were "down and out." Kayburn, assisted by Davidge, had to undertake the task of attending to the motors.

In the period of reaction following the terrific electrical storm, Pengelly was forgotten. No one paid any attention to him until Cross, going to the prisoner's cabin, found the traitor lying senseless upon the floor.

About sunset the mechanics recovered sufficiently to be trusted to remain at their posts, and Kayburn was able to rejoin Cain in the pilot's cabin.

"I wonder if the storm put our wireless out of gear," remarked the captain.

"I'll test the set, sir," replied Kayburn.

"No immediate hurry," was the response.

"May as well do it now," rejoined Kayburn.

His companion nodded.

"As you like," he said. "After all's said and done, what's happening won't affect us very much."

"But I don't like losing touch with what's going on," declared Dick, as he went

to the 'midships cabin, where the four-valve receiving set was installed.

He had not been more than five minutes in the wireless room when he returned to the pilot's cabin.

"My aunt, sir!" he exclaimed excitedly. "There's a jolly big bust up taking place in British Noyada—a nigger insurrection. The swine are playing hell from all accounts. Men-of-war are under orders to proceed to the scene at full speed. Port Ballator is isolated. A message states that the police and volunteers are running short of ammunition, and may not be able to hold out for more than twelve hours. And there are women and children——"

"Mr. Barnard!" sang out the captain.

"Sir?"

"Take the helm, please. Keep her as she is—north ten west."

"North ten west, it is, sir," replied Barnard, as he took the wheel which had been relinquished by his skipper.

Cain unfolded an aerial map and placed it on the table. For a minute or so he was busy with parallel rulers and dividers.

"We're roughly five hundred miles from Port Ballator, Kayburn," he announced. "Six hours hard going. Dash it all! Why did we ditch our bombing-gear when we left Bomanares? I don't know. It would have come in mighty handy. Drink-sodden niggers with razors lashed to canes, I know what that means."

"But there are warships rushing up," Kayburn reminded him.

"Yes; but they may be too late. We'll chip in for all we're worth, old son. If British bluejackets and marines have landed before we show up we can sheer off. Please stand by in the wireless room in case there are any other messages bearing upon the affair."

Already Cain's unusual fit of depression following the storm had vanished. He was his old self, alert, active in body and mind, his whole energies centred upon the task that confronted him.

Summoning Davidge and Cross, the captain explained the situation to the three men.

"Pity we didn't bring the bombs along with us, sir," remarked Davidge.

"That's what the cap'n said," declared Barnard, without shifting his gaze from the compass bowl.

"We've firearms," said Cain, "and, of course, the niggers won't count upon an airship butting in to upset their little game. It will be the moral effect that will count, I expect; but take it from me, my hearties, if there's a chance to send a few dozen of the swine to blue blazes, I'll take it. If we get over the brutes, we'll give 'em

something to remember! Cross, you might collect every article of weight that we can spare. An ounce of metal dropped from a height of, say, four hundred feet, will knock a man's brains out. . . . And our pair of machine-guns!"

Night had now fallen. The airship had to depend solely upon stellar observations to correct her course, for the land, five thousand feet below, consisted of dense vegetation and without any towns or villages that might be identified as aids to navigation. Kayburn, as he frankly admitted, was no pilot, in the sense that he could determine his position by observation of the altitude of certain celestial bodies. The whole responsibility in that respect had to be shouldered by Captain Cain.

Nevertheless, Cain found time to pay Pengelly a visit. It was the first he had made since his former partner had been placed on board the airship.

The prisoner had recovered his senses, although he was in a state bordering upon panic.

"Stow that!" interrupted Cain sternly, as Pengelly began to whine and grovel. "Pull yourself together and be a man—if you can. You were once. Now, listen; there's fighting to be done and I want you to bear a hand."

Pengelly raised his eyes. His full lips appeared to pout more than usual.

"Fighting?" he echoed. "What sort of fighting? The old game, eh?"

"No," replied Cain shortly.

His former partner looked disappointed. Pengelly was a man of strange moods. When he had a chance to "do his bit" in the Great War, he exhibited a craven eagerness to keep out of harm's way. Five times he figuratively crawled before a tribunal, and finally failing to get exemption contrived to avoid the danger of the firing-line for a safe job in a munition works in England. After the Armistice he announced himself as an ex-officer who had shed his blood for King and Country on three different occasions; but very soon after he had entered into partnership with Cain in the Polkyl Shipbreaking Company the ex-naval officer saw through the shallow deceit of the recreant Pengelly.

Yet, on the other hand, Pengelly had proved himself to be a fighter. Even Cain was surprised at the manner in which he had played his part in the action between the *Alerte* and the Spanish destroyer *Villamil*; and it was in the hope that Pengelly would exhibit similar enthusiasm that he had invited the fellow's aid in the anticipated operations against the revolted negroes.

"There are women and children in peril," said Cain.

Pengelly shrugged his shoulders. Chivalry was not one of his strong points.

Cain started on another tack.

"I'm willing to pay for your assistance," he said. "Play the man; fight as you did

at Wad-el-Abuam, when we scuppered the Spaniard, and we'll cry quits. I'll land you within easy distance of a town either in Brazil, Venezuela or Colombia, give you cash to carry on, and then, provided you don't trouble me, I'll not trouble you."

Pengelly pondered over the proposition.

"I suppose you'll give me away to Scotland Yard as an escaped convict?"

"I'm not in the habit of communicating with Scotland Yard," replied Cain, with thinly-veiled sarcasm.

"All right: it's a deal," agreed Pengelly.

Cain handed him an automatic.

"It's loaded," he said. "You'll find spare ammunition for'ard. I want you to serve one of the machine-guns with Davidge."

The captain turned his back upon his former partner and strode out, leaving the door unlocked. Meekly Pengelly followed, his emotionless features belying the thoughts that rioted in his brain.

Shortly before midnight Kayburn picked up a message to the effect that the insurgents had effected an entry into the southern part of Port Ballator and had fired several of the buildings. The defenders, whose losses were heavy, were still holding out, but were hemmed in on all sides. The negroes had sunk several large barges on the bar of the river, thus making any escape by water impossible, and at the same time preventing any armed boats from effecting a dash to the beleaguered town. As a matter of fact there were no armed boats, for the simple reason that the British warships were still a couple of hundred miles away.

At one in the morning, Cain called his companions' attention to a lurid glare on the horizon almost dead ahead. Other fires of lesser magnitude were also visible. The airship was approaching the frontiers of British Noyada.

A few minutes later Cain gave the order, "On bow searchlight. Stand by, machine-gun party!"

The commands were promptly executed. Barnard and Cross manned one of the machine-guns, the other being served by Davidge and Pengelly. One of the Paraquilan mechanics connected up the lead from the dynamo to the for'ard searchlight, adjusted the carbons and directed the powerful beam at ten degrees below the horizontal.

"Look, sir! The altimeter!" suddenly exclaimed Kayburn warningly.

Cain glanced at the instrument. The needle was steadily going back. At the present moment it indicated eight hundred feet.

"What's wrong?" he demanded, and bending to the voice-tube ordered one of the mechanics in the motor-room to go to the gas-container chamber and release

more hydrogen into the balloonettes.

For about two minutes the downward movement was checked. The airship even gained a thousand feet; then the earthbound drop began again.

"Give more gas!" shouted Cain.

"*Dios, capitán!*" replied the scared Paraquilan. "It is escaping as fast as it goes in! Four of the balloonettes are leaking."

Cain set his jaw tightly.

"More gas!" he ordered. "All of it, if necessary."

It was perfectly obvious that the airship's career as an airship was approaching the end. Realising this, Cain determined to keep up until the vessel was within a mile or so of Port Ballator. If he could not fight the insurgents from the air, he would do so on the ground. His chief fear was that the airship would make a forced landing too far from the scene of conflict, and all his energies were devoted to nursing her along towards the spot where the fiercely-burning fires indicated the presence of the infuriated negroes.

By this time the airship seemed to be going straight for a wall of red-and-orange flame, surmounted by a pall of dense black smoke that appeared to hang motionless in the still air.

Not a moment too soon did Cain telegraph for "Stop!"

The motors ceased their steady drone. An uncanny silence followed as far as the interior of the craft was concerned. For without the crackling and roaring of the flames, the sharp fusillade of small-arms and the frenzied shouts of the rum-maddened negroes indicated that the British defenders of Port Ballator were still maintaining a desperate resistance.

"Stand by to jump clear when she makes contact, lads!" roared Cain. "Stick to those machine-guns and keep together. We'll give the brutes a thundering hiding yet."

Thirty seconds later the airship bumped. She had dropped with her bows depressed, and although the compact was not severe the for'ard compartments were buckled and the reek of hydrogen filled the heated air.

All hands, armed to the teeth, leapt clear, the machine-gunners sticking gamely to their weighty charges. They had barely covered a hundred yards when the glare of the burning buildings paled into insignificance by a terrific flash. The remaining gas left in the balloonettes had exploded. The airship was a mass of fiercely-burning flames.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### EXIT PENGELLY

“Keep in touch!” shouted Cain. “One machine-gun on each flank.”

The little band pressed on, guided by the shouts and reports of firearms. Apparently the negroes were so intent upon their work of murder and rapine that they had failed to notice the burning airship.

For the first quarter of a mile over which Cain’s party made their way, the ground consisted of swamps covered with sugar-cane. Attempts had been made to burn the canes, either by the defenders in order to create an exposed arc of fire, or else by the attackers out of sheer love of destruction; but these efforts had met with little success.

Presently, on breasting a slight incline, Cain made out the figures of a mob of negroes silhouetted against the glare of the burning buildings. Almost at the same time bullets began to whine over the heads of the airship’s crew.

“Lie down, men!” ordered Cain.

He crawled forward a few yards and levelled his binoculars. Then he rejoined his men.

“All right so far,” he reported. “The swine haven’t spotted us. It’s the defenders’ bullets that are singing over our heads. Left incline! Make for the lee of that building.”

The building was a large store that was now well alight. It had evidently been plundered before being fired, for close to it lay the bodies of about a score of looters who had been shot down by the defenders before the latter were compelled to withdraw to the farther end of the town. The reek of charred flesh and burning spirits filled the air.

“Cheerful-looking specimens, what?” remarked Kayburn, indicating a couple of corpses lying in the centre of the wide path, each grasping a razor lashed to a pole in his nerveless hand, and with a hideous grimace on his ebony features.

“They won’t do no more ‘arm, sir,” added Cross.

“I don’t know so much about that,” declared Captain Cain, who had overheard the remark. “Ever heard of nigger playing ‘possum?’ Better make sure they’re properly done in.”

The party made another advance, slowly and cautiously. Ignorant of the lay of the land, Cain had to exercise the greatest discretion until he could obtain a fairly comprehensive idea of his objective. He planned to make a flank attack, but at the

same time he had to make sure that he and his men would not be subjected to a flanking fire from the people he had come to attempt to rescue. Mistakes of that nature, he knew, had occurred before.

A huge negro, staggering under the weight of the loot he bore, appeared round the corner of one of the buildings and came straight for the spot where Cain's party stood. He was within twenty yards of them before he realised his danger.

Dropping his booty and yelling like a maniac, he turned and fled. Realising that if the negro were able to communicate the news of an armed party to his fellow-insurgents all chance of a surprise would be thrown away, Cain levelled his automatic.

By this time the fugitive had increased the distance to about sixty yards—an uncertain range for a pistol.

The sharp crack of the weapon was almost inaudible in the terrific din, but Cain's aim was none the less deadly on that account. The negro, hit fairly between the shoulder-blades, gave a convulsive spring in the air, with his arms outstretched. Then he fell face downwards, writhed for a matter of about ten seconds and lay still.

Advancing by a series of short rushes and taking advantage of the doubtful cover afforded by the smoking débris of a number of wooden huts, the airship's crew got within two hundred yards of a large body of negroes. The latter were either rallying after a repulse or were concentrating for an assault. Many of them were armed with rifles (an ominous business, that; it meant that they had managed to secure the weapons from some of the white men); others brandished machetes and their favourite close-quarters weapon, a razor lashed to a bamboo; a few carried cans of petrol, while half a dozen black fiends were holding on to a baulk of timber with the obvious intention of using it as a battering-ram.

Although in full view of the defences they were not subjected to rifle-fire. Ammunition, as far as the British were concerned, had long since run low. All they could do was to reserve their fire until every shot told.

"Let 'em have it!" exclaimed Cain. "Aim low and give plenty of traverse."

The machine-gunners set up their weapons—air-cooled and capable of firing 500 shots per minute. Belts of .250 ammunition were brought up to the mechanism. The men bent over the sights.

"Let's hope they won't jam," thought Cain, as he gave the signal to open fire.

The rapid, sputtering explosions of the machine-guns outvoiced the frenzied shouts of the drink-maddened mob. A sheaf of bullets ricochetting from the sun-baked earth took toll of the insurgents. Men fell in heaps without having time to realise whence death came.

For the most part the negroes were too inflamed with rum to flee in terror. Quite a hundred of them, led by a gigantic brute wearing the white tropical helmet of an officer of the British Noyada police, attempted to charge the deadly machine-guns.

The attackers melted away before the death-dealing bullets, but it did not mean that the conflict was a one-sided business. Even in their frenzy the negroes were cunning brutes, for in a very short time they renewed the attack, supported by a rough-and-ready sort of armoured tank.

This consisted of a couple of large, cylindrical iron boilers, urged onwards by a dozen stalwart men, while fifty others followed under the lee of the moving fortress. Although the curved surface of the boilers was splayed with nickel, the machine-gun bullets were futile against the thick metal plating.

Cain realised that here was a factor that had not entered into his calculations; but he was too wary a leader not to deal an effective counter-stroke. During the advance he had noted the lay of the land, against the possibility of having to fall back against overwhelming numbers, and in view of that contingency he remembered seeing a stone building, almost the only one that had not been set on fire.

The moment he saw that the machine-guns were useless against the metal mobile shields, he gave the order for retreat. As soon as the negroes were aware of the retirement of their foes, most of them started in pursuit, firing erratic volleys as they ran. The boilers they abandoned as unnecessary encumbrances.

“Stand fast, men!” roared Cain. “Let ’em have it!”

The order was obeyed with alacrity. Even the Paraquilan mechanics had sufficient confidence in their leader to change their somewhat precipitate retreat for a halt with their faces to the foes.

Again the machine-guns spoke. Bereft of the shelter of their rolling defences the insurgents broke and fled, leaving the ground strewn with their dead and wounded.

Cain was quick to take advantage of the situation. No longer was there need to fall back upon the position he had originally intended. The boilers, standing deserted in the centre of the street, were his for the asking. If they had served as an efficient shelter to insurgents, they would serve an equal purpose for him.

“Forward, men!” he ordered. “We’ll have those boilers! Mind as you advance, in case any of the wounded niggers slash at you with their knives.”

The objective was reached without opposition, and Cain immediately took steps to consolidate the position. The boilers were shifted until they stood parallel to each other and at a distance of ten feet apart. At each end a machine-gun was posted so as to command an almost complete front. Stones were piled up at either end to form a low barricade and also to prevent any attempt on the part of the negroes to roll the

cylinders together and thus crush the defender between the two masses of metal.

So far Cain had attained a considerable measure of success. Even if he had not driven off the rebels completely, he had created a diversion in favour of the sorely-pressed Europeans in Port Ballator. Yet he was unable to effect a juncture with the people he had come to aid. More than likely they were unaware of what had occurred, and there were no feasible means of communicating with the garrison. Until Cain could establish his identity it would be gross folly to attempt to make his way to the barricades protecting Port Ballator. In the uncertain light, Cain and his men would almost certainly be shot down by those he had risked everything to rescue.

Undoubtedly he had committed the same error that Britons have done and will do all over the world; he had underrated his foe. He had calculated upon the negroes taking to flight at the first bark of the machine-guns. It was quite possible that they might renew the attack; although, on the other hand, they would probably abandon their designs upon Port Ballator after daybreak. Even a drink-influenced black hesitates to attempt by day what he would with the utmost recklessness under the cover of night.

Another circumstance that had upset his calculations was the loss of the airship. Had she remained up, her appearance would have struck superstitious terror into the hearts of the insurgents, and once they had taken themselves off, Cain would be at liberty to resume his Odyssey. As it was, in the event of the siege being raised, Cain and his companions would be stranded in Port Ballator. It was quite possible that some of the officers of the British warships hurrying to the rescue might recognise the former captain of the pirate submarine *Alerte*; and although they would probably "look the other way," he had no desire to come in contact with the service in which he once held commissioned rank.

For the next hour or so things were relatively quiet. The rifle-firing had died away, and, although the blacks continued their blood-curdling yell, no renewal of the fighting was attempted.

"I shan't be sorry to see the dawn, Kayburn," remarked Cain. "If those blighters don't clear off, we'll have to make a dash for the town as soon as it's light."

"The warships ought to be there by that time," rejoined Kayburn, "if only——"

"Look out, sir!" shouted Barnard warningly. "The blighters are bunching up for a rush."

It was only too true. While hundreds of the insurgents were yelling themselves hoarse, others had crept quietly under the lee of a gentle rise of ground within a hundred yards of Cain's defences, and in practically the only position where they

were not exposed to machine-gun fire without the weapon being open to a flanking fire from the ruined buildings on the left. Already bullets from that direction were either whizzing overhead or else pattering loudly upon the boiler-plates.

The assault was of brief duration, but not lacking in intensity. Kayburn had a disjointed impression of what occurred. He remembered emptying his automatic into the faces of a crowd of diabolical-looking negroes who attempted to clamber over the metal boiler; noticed out of the corner of his eye that one of the machine-guns was silent with a cartridge jammed immovably in the breech; saw Cain seize the remaining gun, leap upon the metal breastwork and splay bullets at point-blank range into the yelling, frenzied mob; felt something hit him like a blow of a sledge-hammer, and fell back into the darkened recess between the boilers, with a bullet through the shoulder.

For an ill-defined period Kayburn felt as sick as a dog. Then the mist cleared from his eyes. Cain was lying close to him, his head supported on Barnard's arm. The negroes had abandoned the attack.

"What's the matter with that fool?" suddenly exclaimed Davidge, pointing with a bandaged hand over the top of the defences.

Kayburn staggered to his feet and looked.

Right on the heels of the vanquished blacks ran Pengelly flourishing an automatic and shouting at the top of his voice. He made no attempt to fire the weapon. In the glare of the burning buildings his movements could be clearly seen. He looked like a dog chasing a crowd of terrified sheep.

A moment later and by some unaccountable impulse the rearmost of the fugitives stopped; turned and threw themselves upon the madman—for mad he undoubtedly was.

Knives and razors glittered in the firelight. Pengelly was down with a dozen bloodthirsty wretches hacking at his already lifeless body.

Then a machine-gun spluttered close to Kayburn's hand. Cross had succeeded in getting it into position again. When it ceased, Pengelly's body was hidden under the corpses of his assailants.

"Fair barmy he was, I'll allow," exclaimed Cross, as he proceeded to fit another belt of ammunition to the gun. "How's the cap'n, mate?"

"Done in, worse luck," replied Davidge laconically.

## CHAPTER XXV

### VINDICATION

“Best let me bandage your shoulder, sir,” suggested Barnard.

“It’s nothing much,” protested Kayburn. “Clean puncture. . . . See if you can do anything for him.”

He pointed to the motionless form of Captain Cain.

“Time enough to tend to the dead when we’ve fixed up with the living, I guess, sir,” rejoined Barnard, as he dexterously cut away Kayburn’s tunic. “Two down and out—gone West—and two wounded. We’ve paid a pretty stiff price.”

“It’s worth it,” declared Kayburn. “Even Captain Cain would have said so. We’ve drawn off the attack upon the town. . . . Thanks, that feels better already,” he added, as Barnard deftly bandaged the wound. “It felt like being kicked by a mule. I wonder my shoulder hadn’t been blown clean away.”

“Bullet went in an’ out,” reported the Good Samaritan. “Lucky the swine weren’t using soft-nosed stuff. And Pengelly’s gone!”

“Ay, the swab!” exclaimed Cross.

Kayburn turned and looked reprovingly at the speaker.

“He did his bit at the last, at any rate,” he said.

“That he did, sir,” agreed Cross. “An’ that’s his dirty work.”

He pointed to Cain’s body. Blood from a wound *in the back* was staining the captain’s white drill jacket.

“What’s that?” demanded Kayburn and Barnard simultaneously.

“Fact,” persisted Cross. “It was while I was a-foolin’ round with that jammed gun, Pengelly, my opposite number, markin’ time as it were. When the cap’n grabbed t’other gun and got atop of that there boiler, I saw Pengelly, out of the corner of my eye, raise his pistol and shoot the cap’n down. I’d have put a bullet through the swab’s head, only I couldn’t very well knock off what I was doin’. Then he jumps over the barricade and makes a bolt for it. You know what happened then. Fair off his rocker, if ever a bloke was, I’ll allow.”

“Let’s hope for his sake that he was,” said Kayburn soberly. “Now, let’s see  
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His suggestion was interrupted by the loud crash of a quick-firer, followed by a regular salvo of medium-sized ordnance. Shells were bursting amongst the sugar-canapes to the south-east of Port Ballator, where the insurgents were congregating.

“A warship’s arrived,” declared Barnard. “It’s all over bar the shouting.”

"Let's hope they won't start strafing us in error," said Kayburn. "It'll be light in a few minutes. As soon as we can establish our identity we'll get out of this."

With the first streaks of dawn shell-fire ceased. Out of the relieved town poured bluejackets with machine-guns, Mills bombs, rifles and bayonets, all eager to punish the barbarous and bloodthirsty rebels who, but for Cain's intervention, would have burnt the town and butchered the inhabitants.

"What are you fellows doing here?" demanded an officer, as he encountered the survivors of the airship's crew.

"Our bit, sir," replied Barnard.

"So I should think," rejoined the naval officer, glancing at the pile of corpses surrounding the improvised fortress. "Want any assistance? You'll find our doctor in the town. Good luck!"

The landing party swept onwards. The way to Port Ballator was open.

Carried on the shoulders of four of his devoted crew, Cain's body was taken into the town. Already a gap had been made in the defences, and through this the survivors of the airship made their way.

"By Jove!" exclaimed a weary and hideously dirty officer of the Noyada police —the sole unwounded commissioned officer of the eight who had been shut up in the beleaguered town, "so you are the fellows who kicked up that diversion last night? We wondered what it could be. You've saved the situation. We were reduced to less than a hundred rounds. If those blighters hadn't switched off to attend to you we'd have been properly in the soup. Come along! We've plenty of food and drink. You look as if you need both. What, a doctor? There's the *Jutland's* M.O. over there."

The Surgeon-Commander of the *Jutland* was having a busy time, for the casualties amongst the military and civil population had been heavy. Under his direction the light cruiser's sick-berth staff were working like Trojans. In the circumstances, Kayburn felt it advisable to wait for his wound to be dressed. There were others in greater need of medical assistance.

A lieutenant, gaitered and belted and with a service revolver strapped to his side, came limping back from the firing-line. As he passed, he glanced at the motionless form of the former pirate captain and brought up all standing.

"Excuse me," he said, addressing Kayburn, "but how did he come here?"

"You know him, then?" asked the airman.

"Yes," replied Broadmayne. "I had hoped to meet him again, but not in these circumstances. Is he dead?"

Kayburn inclined his head.

“Bullet through the heart,” he announced. “He was a white man, if ever there was.”

In spite of his injuries, Broadmayne knelt by the side of his former captor.

“He’s breathing!” he declared. “He’s not dead. Fetch the doctor, one of you.”

During the brief wait, Broadmayne caught the eye of Barnard, the ex-pirate bo’sun; but there was no sign of recognition. Both men realised that the naval officer knew the other’s secret, and was content to let it stop at that.

Twelve hours later, Cain recovered consciousness to find Broadmayne standing by the side of his cot.

“So you’ve found me,” remarked Cain feebly.

“Yes, Commander Alhampton,” replied the lieutenant. “I’m awfully sorry——”

The wounded man gave a wry smile.

“I’ve cheated you after all,” he declared. “But you might have respected my *nom de guerre*.”

“No need for that,” said Broadmayne. “You can honourably make use of your own name. You have received the Royal pardon, the sentence of the court-martial is quashed and you are restored to your former rank.”

“A bit too late in the day,” protested Cain grimly. “There are other counts to be taken into consideration. However, I’m slipping my cable. It’s good to hear that I’ve been cleared of one accusation; but I want to ask a favour, Mr. Broadmayne. My men: you know . . . they were with me in the *Alerte*.”

“Yes, I know,” rejoined the lieutenant. “They won’t be penalised, I can assure you. Neither will you, sir. My skipper reported your case to the Admiralty, and on our way up from Bomanares we had a wireless to say that the Government proposed to take no further action in the *Alerte* affair, and that you would be at liberty to return to England whenever you wish.”

A smile flitted over the pale features of the wounded ex-pirate and ex-Presidente.

“Life’s worth living after that,” he remarked.

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Six weeks later, Commander Ambrose Alhampton, R.N., set foot upon his native shores.



## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Case has been fixed in the TOC.

[The end of *Captain Cain* by Percy F. Westerman]