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Thrilling Story of Mystery Ship

LONG VOYAGE ENDS ABRUPTLY.

(News of the World.)

Adventures of Morgan the Buccaneer and Captain Kettle pale into insignificance when compared with the adventures of the "Mystery Ship"—otherwise the five-masted schooner General Serret. There are, very few five-masted schooners in existence, and when the General Serret came up the Thames the other day, men who had spent long lives on the water and the wharves robbed their eyes and gazed in astonishment. A few years ago a German five-masted schooner foundered in a gale off Dover. So that reduced the small number of this type of ship afloat. A sister ship of the General Serret is the Duke of Westminster's yacht, Flying Cloud. Built in the United States of Oregon oak, the General Serret is a really beautiful vessel, and well suited to the purposes for which she was chartered. Starting her career as a cadet ship in the United States Navy, she was sold in 1919 to the French Government, and was again used for training naval cadets. After one trip she reached Marseilles in 1920, and a gentleman living in Paris bought her for breaking up. But before this plan could be put into execution a Greek purchased the ship, and took her to Antwerp, his scheme being to smuggle emigrants into the United States. But the plan came to grief, and one night the Belgian police raided the ship, with astonishing results. Sixty men of various nationalities were found on board, all of them in possession of forged passports. As they were being taken ashore

A Woman's Scream Was Heard.

The police resumed their search of the ship and eventually found in the lazaret about 20 women, some of whom were accompanied by babies. Legal proceedings followed, and, in the end, those responsible for the affair were severely punished. Once more the ship was up for sale, and this time it came into the possession of Madame Gloria de Casares, whose husband is stated to be a son of one of the wealthiest men in South America. A woman of great beauty, with a keen eye to business, she acquired the General Serret for a little over £1,000. Having no immediate use for the General Serret, Madame Casares laid up the ship in Antwerp until such time as someone cared to charter her. On Jan. 14 of this year Capt. W. R. Whitburn, who is in his 68th year, was appointed to the command of the ship. An old sea dog—he has been a master for 35 years—Whitburn went over to Antwerp to join the ship and to plunge himself into an unending series of adventures such as he had never experienced in his life before. Whitburn, who is just a simple sailor-man, and loves nothing better than to be in command of a "wind-jammer," has had many strange adventures at sea. He ran a cargo of whisky to the States in the motor schooner Tom August, the owner of the cargo being a London man, who has made a lot of money out of the rum-running business. It was whilst he was on the Tom August that Whitburn was offered the General Serret, he having met the owners' representative whilst he was trading in Rum Row. On this occasion, however, the rum-running trip resulted in a big loss, for having delivered 18,000 cases of whisky, the

Purchasers Forgot to Pay,

and Whitburn returned to this country empty-handed. There was a skeleton crew of eight aboard the General Serret when Whitburn took over his command, and both captain and crew had no end of a time until the beginning of August last. Then troubles came as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. Some time in July two young Englishmen, with a bit of money to spare and a distinct liking for a gamble, decided to enter the rum-running business. Now, if one is lucky in this trade, the profits are enormous. Whisky can be bought out of bond in this country at 25s. a case of 12 bottles. It can be sold in Rum Row at from 30 to 35 dollars a case—the average is 35 dollars—so that there is a gross profit of not less than £7 per case. There are risks, of course; but in the opinion of the gentlemen referred to, the risks were well worth taking. Looking round for a ship to take their cargo, they found the General Serret, and chartered her for the voyage, the charter calling for a payment of £1,800—£800 down and the remainder when the cargo had been delivered. It also called for the ship

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to be ready for sea in seven days; but when Capt. E. Mills Joyce, who was with Shackleton and Scott in the Antarctic, went over to Antwerp on Aug. 4, to take over the ship, as supercargo representing the owners of the whisky, he found her merely a shell. There was no rope or running-gear to hoist the sails, no provisions, water, coal, or stores. These were, in due course, provided by the charterers. The cargo, 10,000 cases and 254 barrels of whisky, valued at £25,000 was got aboard, and soon the ship was ready for sea. Then real trouble commenced. Writ after writ was served on the ship, and each writ meant delay. As the writs were served they were paid off, and on August 20 the General Serret, in tow of tugs, left the harbour for her voyage across the Atlantic, her ostensible port being Halifax, Nova Scotia, but her real destination Rum Row. She was half-way through the dock gates when the

Water Bailiff Made a Dramatic Entry

on the scene. "Take her back!" was his shouted order to the tugs as he waved yet another writ, and back she went. Again the writ was settled, and the ship went forth to sea to encounter still more trouble. She duly escaped one at Antwerp by the skin of her stern anchor, for as she cleared the dock a solicitor and his client arrived with another writ. But they were too late, and so the General Serret forged down the Scheldt into the North Sea. She dipped her bows as she encountered a fairly stiff breeze from the south-west, and, with sail set and the auxiliary engines doing a small part of their bit, shaped a course for the Downs. But it was by no means plain sailing. By the time the North Foreland lay on the starboard bow engine trouble had developed. The General Serret limped on through the Downs, making about four knots against the head wind, and crept past Dover into the Channel. By this time the breeze had increased in force; the ship was making less than three knots; in fact, she had not steerage way. Under these circumstances, Capt. Whitburn ordered sail to be taken off and the anchor dropped, and the five-masted schooner, which to many looked like the ghost of the wrecked German ship, lay off the Shakespeare Cliff. Aboard her at this time were the two supercargoes, Captain Joyce, another ex-naval man, Major F. W. Mansell, Capt. Whitburn, and a crew of 31, made up of Estonians, Belgians, Greeks and Maltese. Her register having run out, the General Serret was running under a provisional registry granted by the Board of Trade, which enabled her to proceed from port to port. Captain Whitburn, in his dilemma, wired to the owner, who sent a representative

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THE SIGN OF THE BIG BOOT.

down to the ship. In the end the schooner was ordered into Dover for the necessary repairs to engines and boilers, and while she lay alongside the breakwater in this famous gateway to England further trouble developed. A number of the crew were to be intoxicated, and the supercargoes came to the conclusion that the cargo had been broached. A complete search revealed the fact that the seals placed upon the hatches by the Belgian customs were still intact, but as it was certain that some members of the crew had got at the cargo, Joyce and Mansell proceeded with their investigations. At long last they found in the bunkers a hatchway, not disclosed on the ship's plans, which led to the hold. The whisky had been loaded under Nos. 1 and 2 hatches, under No. 2 hatch was the coal necessary for the voyage; and to get to the whisky the men had to pass through the mystery hatch and

Tunnel A Way Through the Coal.

It was a desperate and hazardous proceeding; but that they succeeded in their enterprise, which might well have cost a life or two, was evidenced by the fact of their drunkenness and possession of bottles of whisky. By this time the Customs had come upon the scene, and matters having reached a serious climax, the supercargoes, in the interests of their employers, decided, in order to protect the cargo, to proceed to the Port of London. The General Serret had entered Dover as a ship in distress; she left as a ship of some notoriety—for news of her mission had been published in the Press—and when she arrived in the Thames she was the object of much curiosity and many jokes. As she made up the estuary the passengers on a passing pleasure steamer shout-

ed requests for a bottle, barges with voices as hoarse as the voice of a bos's mate expressed themselves as only barges can, and others had various comments to offer. The ship excited tremendous interest, and huge crowds cocked to see her swinging to her anchor in the "Pool." Excursions and alarms followed her arrival. The whisky cargo was unloaded and placed in bond, writs were nailed to her masts on behalf of the captain and the crew, and after a few days she was taken down to Charlton, where she now lies in charge of the Admiralty Marshal. Meanwhile the whisky is still in bond, but not many weeks will elapse before it is being consumed in the United States. At a future date the "News of the World" will be able to tell how the whisky reached the States

and how it was sold. But that, as Kipling would say, is another story. One of the last acts in this drama was the receipt by Capt. Whitburn of a letter from the solicitors representing the owner of the ship, enclosing a postal order for 4s. with which to pay off the two supercargoes. As a rule, supercargoes sign on the ship's articles, and are given the nominal wage of 1s. per month. Joyce and Mansell did not sign the articles of the General Serret. Few men of 60 have had such an adventurous career as Capt. E. Mills Joyce. He was born in the coastguard station at Bognor in 1875, educated at Greenwich, and joined the Navy in 1891. During the South African war he was wrecked in H.M.S. Sybil off the coast of Africa, and in later years went with Capt. Scott on the An-

taretic expedition of 1901-4. Rejoining the Navy, he subsequently purchased his discharge to accompany Sir Ernest Shackleton in the expedition of 1907-9. He became second in command of the Ross Sea Expedition of 1914-17, and after the death of Capt. Mackintosh took complete control. It was in this expedition that Joyce travelled many hundreds of miles in the company of Wild and Richards, dragging three stricken comrades on a sledge for 44 days. For this he received from the King the highest honour, the Albert Medal, in the middle of last year.

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OH! I'M A PIRATE BOLD! QUITE RICH IN SPANISH GOLD! I'VE FOUND A KID SUIT TO ADD TO MY LOOT! I'M LUCKY, SO I'M TOLD!

I'LL HANG IT UP HERE NO ROBBERIES I FEAR FOR I'M A BAD MAN WITH A HOOK FOR A HAND

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By CY HUNGERFORD