THE PENANG PIRATE

BY

J. C. HUTCHESON
The Penang Pirate

and

The Lost Pinnace

BY

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ILLUSTRATED

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THE PENANG PIRATE;
OR, THE VOYAGE OF THE "HANKOW LIN."

CHAPTER I.

IN THE PEARL RIVER.

"BILL!"
"Aye, aye, bo!"
"Guess this'll be a rum v'yage, mate."

"Why, old shellback?"
"'Cause I can't make out why we are wasting our time here, with the cargo all aboard and the wind fair."

"Don't you fret yourself about that, Jem Backstay. The skipper knows what he's a-doing, and has got a heap o' ' sponsibility on them shoulders o' his'n—a fine ship and a valuable cargo to get home safe to old h'England with a short crew, and a lot o' murderin', blood-suckin' pirates all over the h'Indian seas!"
"Pirates, Bill!"

"Ay, pirates! I spoke plain enough, didn't I? But you needn't shiver in your skin like one of them white-livered Lascars we've got aboard in place of honest sailors, worse luck! You needn't have no cause to fear for the number o' your mess, bo; the cap'en—God bless him!—will see us safe through, you may be sure."

"Right you are, Bill; you know the old man better nor I, and I s'pose he's taking cautions like?"

"No fear, mate. He's got his head screwed on right enough, my bo."

"And that's the reason, p'raps, he'd that long palaver with the admiral's flagship afore we come up the river?"

"Ay," said Bill sententiously; "may be so."

"Well, Bill, if so be there's pirates about, they might do a'most as they likes wi' us, for I don't think there are three cutlasses aboard, and ne'er a musket as I can see, and only powder enough to fire off that little popgun there to summons a pilot."

"Aye," answered the other nonchalantly.

The *Hankow Lin* was lying in the Pearl River, off Whampoa, some twelve miles below Canton, to which anchorage all sailing vessels having busi-
ness at this port of the Celestial Empire are restricted by the mandarins, only steamers being permitted to ascend the reaches of the river to the city proper and anchor in front of Shah Mien, the English settlement.

The vessel had shipped all her tea and silk, which formed a valuable cargo; and, with her anchor hove short, so that she seemed to ride just over it, and her topsails loose all handy to let fall and sheet home, she appeared ready to start at a moment’s notice on her homeward voyage—down the ugly Canton River and across the pathless Indian seas and the miles of weary ocean journey that lay between her and her final destination, “the tight little island,” with its now historical “streak of silver sea,” supposed to guard it from Continental invasion.

What delayed the *Hankow Lin*?

Ah! her captain could tell perhaps, for it might be taken for granted that there was some urgent reason for his remaining here with no possible object to gain when his cargo was stowed and the ship homeward bound. The seamen could make nothing of it, however; and there was much grumbling forwards at this unlooked-for hitch in their departure from the land of “chin chins” and “no bony Johnny.”
Jem Backstay, who was a stalwart, able-bodied seaman, and as smart a "hand" as could be found in a day's cruise, did not appear at all convinced by what his chum Bill, the boatswain, had said, for he returned again to the conversation after the latter had apparently ended it with his monosyllabic "aye."

"Lor', mate!" said he, "I thinks your old brains are woolgathering about pirates. I've been sailing in these here China seas since I were no higher than your thumb and I never see none."

"Haven't you?" muttered the other disdainfully.

"No, never a one."

"And you've never seen none of 'em h'exe-
cuted, as I have, at Canton, in batches of a dozen or more?"

"No, Bill; how does they do it?"

"Why, mate, they makes the beggars all kneel down in a row, with their hands tied behind them so that they can't put 'em up. Then a chap comes along—I s'pose he's called their Jack Ketch—and he carries a sword that's partly made like a cutlass and partly like a butcher's cleaver, with which he slices off all their heads like so many carrots."
"Lor'!"

"Yes, bo; and the funny thing is to see this executioner chap going along behind all the kneeling figures, afore he knocks their heads off, and pulling this one here and a-shovin' that one theer, so arrangin' on 'em that he can have a clean stroke when he-ups with his sword."

"Lor'!" exclaimed the other on hearing this description.

"Yes, bo, it's all true as gospel what I'm a-tellin' on you. The hangman chap don't seem to make no more account of them poor devils than if they wos so many wooden dummies, like them 'Quaker guns' as they call—cos they can't hurt nobody, I s'pose—that them silly artful Chinese mounted in the Bogue forts to frighten us, as they thought, when we went to war with 'em last time, you know."

"But, talkin' about h'executions, Bill, ain't talkin' of pirates, is it, bo? Praps those poor ignorant chaps you seed have their heads chopped off mightn't no more a' been pirates than you or I."

"Mightn't they!" ejaculated the boatswain of the Hankow Lin in the most indignant tones. "Much you know about it, you son of a sea-cook, that's all! Why, Jem, I could tell you stories
about them cut-throats of the sea in these here waters as would make your hair stand on end. No pirates in the China seas, you say, my joker?"

"I didn't say as there wasn't any. I said as there mightn't ha' been."

"Well, and wot's the difference, I'd like to know?"

"Belay that, and bouse away, old ship, with that yarn o' yours that's going to fright my hair off. I ain't quite frightened yet, I tell you."

"Wait a minute, then, bo," said the other, who was suddenly called aft by the officer of the watch to have some order given him for the morning which had been forgotten; and on his return to the foc's'le Jem was all attention for him to proceed with his promised yarn about the real pirates of whom he had spoken, the worthy seaman continuing to express a strong disbelief in their entity.

"Heave ahead with that 'ere story o' yours," he said.

"Don't you know, you onbelievin' swab, as how the Singapore mail steamer was nearly as possible plundered by a whole gang o' them gettin' aboard of her as make-believe passengers and then setting fire to her and plundering the cargo, and that this occurred only last year?"
"No, I never heerd tell of it," said Jem.

"Well, I think I've got a noospaper in my ditty-box down below as will tell you all about it, and then, p'r'aps, you'll feel as if you'd believe there was sich things as pirates."

So saying, the boatswain bustled down into the forecastle, and shortly reappeared above, holding a rather dirty crumpled piece of printed paper in his hand, which he handed to Jem.

"There," he said, "take that and read for yourself."

The brawny seaman turned it over and over with a solemn face, and then handed it back to the other.

"I ain't no scholard," he observed, rubbing his chin thoughtfully; "wish I was, 'twould ha' been pounds in my pocket now if I could read and write as I once did when I war a little shaver, but I've clean forgot it. You reel off the yarn as is printed there, Bill; and then I'll tell you what I think of it."

"All right, then," replied the boatswain, nothing loth to display his superior attainments. "Here goes for a full and true 'count of a tremen-juous piretical plot to seize a mail steamer, from a special despatch of our 'Ong Kong correspond-ent;" and, holding the dirty scrap of paper at