

PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

COPYRIGHT

TABLE TOP

by
Eden Phillpotts

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTER

TOM AYLMER and ANGUS MAINE are enjoying a holiday on the hills of Peru when news from England tells of the death of Tom's father, Tom knows that his father has bequeathed to him the Peruvian Silver Mines of which he (Tom) is the manager.

Before leaving Lima for England, Tom buys a parrot, to give to his fiancée, JANE BRADSHAW. According to the dealer the parrot is about seventy-five years of age.

On the liner, the bird talks to JACOB FERNANDEZ, a rich man of Lima, who is bound for Panama, and whose life-hobby is the study of birds. But the words he can detect in a string of sounds are "Benny Boss". Fernandez says he once knew a man by that name and proceeds to tell Tom and Angus what he knows.

Benny was a man of mixed parentage—English and Peruvian—who, for a time, fifty years earlier, worked for Fernandez. Piecing together what he learned about Benny in later years, it seems that Benny had been engaged in dredging on Lake Titicaca for jewels thrown into the lake at the time of the Spanish conquest.

Arrived in England, Tom obtains the help of an expert linguist, but the man is baffled.

Eventually Jane solves the problem by the discovery that most of the words are English spelt backwards to disguise the meaning of the message. They make the sentence "Table Top on Equator west Galapagos Cache Man-eater Gorge at Geyser," and this is constructed as being a direction to the hiding place of the jewels in which Benny Boss was interested.

Excited by the theory built about this message, Tom, Angus and Jane decide to go and investigate. Tom insists that FELICE PARDO should be included.

The estate of Tom's father having been proved at an amount largely in excess of expectations, and Tom being the sole heir, he feels that he can afford the expense of the fitting out a small expedition.

Pardo, hearing from Tom, is disposed to deride the idea, but after listening to his mother, a cunning woman, he decides to go and obtain for himself any treasure that may be recovered, for he says his mother, is the heir of Benny Boss.

(Now read on)

A SHIP CHARTERED

Now, while they found that he had made admirable preparations for their enterprise, chartered a useful little tramp steamer, kept expenses down and secured trustworthy and experienced men for the cruise, they also discovered Felice himself changed in some subtle fashion. He was more saturnine and preoccupied than of old, given to longer silences, less quicker in emerging from the secret chamber of his own thoughts. They could not know that it was his own thoughts that had created the barrier, any more than Pardo himself knew how his hid-

den purpose had altered his outward demeanour.

In secret he fought with himself still in favour of his intentions, although round and round, like a squirrel in a cage, arguing each point of justice and honour in turn, and spinning a web to entangle and destroy his old loyalties. He told himself that his mental misery was unimportant and only the result of his own weakness; but it created an intense impatience and desire to get on with the matter and be through with it. It was his impatience, indeed that his friends observed, and both Tom and Angus agreed as to so unusual a phase.

"Never knew him in a hurry before," said Maine. "He was always oriental in his contempt for time."

"The dear chap's only thinking of my pocket," declared Aylmer.

A week still needed to elapse before the steamer could be ready for sea. She was a sturdy little boat of about a thousand tons and traded usually between the islands and the mainland. Iguana was her name, and Paolo Costa, her master and owner proved a genial fellow, anxious to forward the trip and amiably inclined to Europeans. He had visited Europe and sailed the Seven Seas in his time; but the Pacific was his home and on one vexed question he could throw light.

"There is, or was such an island as 'Tabletop,'" Captain Costa told them "and on large scale maps you will see it as a nameless pin point. I have not heard it called by any name, save by one old man. There is an ancient sailor living in La Floreana—a bed-ridden, aged chap, who has seen it. Old Pedro Floris actually knew the man who called this islet Tabletop. Fifty and more years ago he took him to the place, and when I visited Floris, as I do sometimes because he is a relation, I told him all that Senor Pardo has told me about Benny Boss. And so it is all true without a doubt. Therefore, if the island has not long since sunk into the sea, it will remain for us to find."

Jane was much excited by this piece of news.

"It means such a lot," she said, "because if this old man has actually been there, he must have some idea of how long it took him, and that ought to tell you how far it is, Captain Costa."

"No, Missy. Old Pedro is very shaky in his mind these days. Sometimes his brain will give a flash and waken memory; but oftener he lives like a lizard—just lives with the shutters up to hide the past. A word sometimes will lift the shutters, but on many days nothing can lift them. I asked him, of course, how long he took on the voyage, but he could not tell me. Only this I learned. They did not steam in those days very much. He was master of a schooner and Benay chartered it. Twice Benny sailed—with a long space of years before his second and last journey. But you must see Pedro Floris, and if it should be a good day with him, you may charm some sense out of him. He has a little English, but not enough. No doubt your friends from Lima will understand him."

"Has Mr. Pardo seen him?" asked Jane, and the sailor told her that Felice had visited the ancient twice.

"But the shutters were up," he said "therefore Senor Pardo got nothing. For reasons I cannot tell, ancient Floris did not like your friend. One does not know what may move in the mind of the very old."

Pardo, however consented to see Aylmer and Jane. He declared that two strangers were all that he could endure, and Tom guessed that he would be able to understand anything that

the old veteran was likely to say. The first suggestion had been that only Pardo and Aylmer should pay the visit; but Felice was conscious of having failed and thought it better not to try again.

"He'll like Jane," he said. "And be sure to take him some gifts. He is very poor."

They sounded Costa on this subject and were advised to make old Floris a present of money.

They found the old man outside a tiny cottage with a woman in attendance upon him. There was no need to face the interior, for Pedro sat in an easy chair under the tattered foliage of banana trees in his little compound. He smiled upon them, took off his hat to Jane and extended a withered paw shaking hands with greater vigour than might have been expected. He proved also more alert than usual, and though his voice had shrunk to a reedy whistle, the aged man controlled it well and did not begin to wander until he was tired. Tom had no difficulty in understanding him.

"Sit you down," he said. "Spread a rug for them Clara, and then go away, my dear."

Clara obeyed and departed. Then Aylmer spoke and told Pedro how good it was of him to let them come.

"This is Jane, Senor Floris, and she is going to marry me very soon," he said. "And Captain Costa told us that you had known Benny Boss long ago, so that interested us very much indeed. Shall I tell you all that we know about him, or would you like to talk first and tell us what you remember?"

"You tell first," answered Pedro "then I tell. And we will see if the stories run together."

Tom therefore told his tale while the other listened silently.

"And if there is anything in it," concluded the young man, "I shall feel that we owe a bit to you, my friend and see you are a gainer."

But the other shook his head.

"I can only help in a small way," he said. "Now I will talk and show you how the stories run together. And my part of the story of Mr. Boss is perhaps not the end of it, even if it is of the end of him, because you are going to try and finish the story."

CHAPTER VIII

MARINER'S TALE

"My little schooner, the 'Condor,' was fifty feet long and eleven feet beam with a free-board of eight upon two feet," began old Pedro Floris. "Five of us sailed her, and she was a very good weather boat, quick in stays and clever to answer our cleverness."

"We traded round about and with the mainland. And then came Benny Boss and ran his eyes over the 'Condor' and reckoned she was good for what he wanted. He had plenty of money and paid in advance. He was going due west to examine an islet that he had seen in his seafaring days, and wanted to find if there was guano there."

"That's what he told me at the time and I had no reason to doubt him, because, though I had never seen the islet, I knew a man who had seen it, and it was in the nature of things that in that vast ocean there might be unknown islands."

"We sailed and had fair weather, and came to the spot he called 'Tabletop,' dead on the equator line."

"How long did it take you, Mr. Floris?" begged Jane through Tom, who voiced her.

But Pedro shook his head.

"Can't tell now. Time has winged away from me, Missy. It may have been weeks or it may have been

months; but we sailed in the summer and came back before the year was told. "Do you remember what it looked like?" asked Tom.

"Oh, yes—very well. A mite of a place—not above five miles across I'd say and the high ground to the west flat as a table—under eternal smoke. A live volcano—that's Tabletop—so to call it—and not higher than five hundred feet above the sea, where the burning mountain was. To the east the land fell into a plain, all green with trees to water's edge. Then it hove up to the crater, but there was a great breach between the fertile land and the west—a gorge through, and we anchored abreast of that gorge."

"A stream ran out from it into the sea, and there was a strip of black beach. All cinders and lava, you understand, with the growing things on the plain; but naked cliffs beetling up to the highest point on the west shore and dropping straight into the water. Very deep sea all round us—no atoll, like a coral island, but just a mighty chimney thrust out from the bowls of the earth to let up the nether fires."

"And then you went ashore?"

"Not me," answered the old man. "Benny didn't want us ashore, and we wasn't allowed there, you might say. He went alone in our little boat, and rowed straight for the gorge. He took a mattock and some stuff in a bag and we landed meanwhile in our pinnace and tried further east, under the queer woodlands, for fresh water. And good water we found; but it was hot. The stream that ran out of the gorge wasn't any use, being loaded with sulphur, but there was sweet water in the forest, though hot, as I told you."

Benny Boss, you understand had took command of the expedition, and that was his right, because he was a man with a lot more brains and experience than us."

"Well, he came back in about two hours, and he was hot and anxious. He asked us if we'd come across any life in the trees and we said nothing but big birds of yellow plumage, that might have been pigeons or else parrots, but were a lot larger than any pigeon or parrots of our knowledge."

"I inquired of him what he'd seen in that hole under the volcano. 'You didn't come across humans?' I asked the man. 'There's worse things than human,' he told me 'and I'll go so far as to say I've had the fright of my life, Pedro.' That was what he said, and I never forgot it, because he was the bravest fellow I ever met. He didn't know the meaning of danger and feared enough living on two legs or four. So to hear him say that he'd known what fear was astonished me above a bit."

"He wouldn't talk of it, however. He was peculiar as to what he'd been through, and passed it off and said that he must have drunk too much liquor the night before and seen what wasn't there. But always after that when the island came up, he called the place 'Maneater Gorge,' and he said 'twas all sulphur and foul vapour, with a hole in the pumice where a hot spring rose and spouted every five minutes. That's all he chose to tell; but he said there was not a speck of guano on the island and no guano gulls to produce it. 'We'll fill our casks with good water,' he said, and then we'll sail for home."

Pedro broke off for a moment and then continued.

"We was soon off, and the island hull down again after we'd filled up. And that's the first voyage. Bid Clara fetch me a cup of milk; then I'll tell about the second voyage. That was a good many years after; but I couldn't remember how many now—all too long ago."

Clara brought him milk and spoke to Tom while he drank it.

"Don't you ire him Master," she said. "He's fine and clear today and put on his best clothes and all."

"It's going to be well worth his while," promised Tom. "He's a wonderful man and you are wonderful too, to look after him so well. He won't need to talk much more, and I shall give him something to please you all very much before I go."

"Money, Master," she begged "That's the only thing that's any good to us." He nodded and Pedro began to talk again.

"As I say, I can't tell as to time, but a good few years must have slipped off the tally, because Benny Boss was black when he first came; but the grey was rippling over his head and beard next time. He was wishful to go to the island again and money didn't lack. He'd got to trust me by now and told me in secret that it was all rubbish about guano and such like. He'd left something there out of harm's way, and now the threat of harm was past and he wanted it back again. Of course that was for my ears alone and we didn't tell the crew. But he left nought to chance. Deep as a well he was. He told the hand that he was doing Government work and had been empowered to set up the Peruvian flag on the godforsaken place and claim it as the possession of his country."

Pedro chuckled and gurgled at this recollection, then proceeded.

"We ran into ugly weather that journey; but the 'Condor' stood up to it, and though we were driven to run from our course for two days, we fetched back on the line again presently and made our way to 'Tabletop.'"

"On the morn after we'd found her Benny got his bag and his mattock and a bit of bunting to hoist upon the high ground. And then he pulled himself ashore—wouldn't suffer anyone to go along with him. We saw him land and make the boat fast, and then he took his traps and disappeared up the gorge. Of course I knew he was gone for his treasure, but my men had not heard told about that. He'd took a little six-chambered revolver along with him so 'twas clear he felt a chance might come when he'd need it."

The old man's words began to come slower and his eye-lids dropped.

"Stick to it, Mr. Floris," urged Tom

"You're a grand story-teller." "I'm very well renowned for stories," admitted Pedro, "but this one is told There's little more to say. Ben hung fire and we saw no sign of him as the hours passed. Then came night and yet no sign. All was very quiet and still with no danger to the boat, so we held on. I was for manning our pinnace and going ashore in her to search for him; but my crew were all against. Benny had done his work too well and put fear in 'em and I couldn't go alone. Nor could I venture to order them because against the panic fear that was in 'em orders would have been all in vain."

"Next morn there lay the boat, but no sign of the man. We went ashore to the forest and got water and found some trees of wild banana. They were the biggest ever I saw—2ft. long and weighing over 2lb. apiece. The birds fed on 'em."

"For a week we hung off the island, but never a sign he gave and never a flag he lifted, so it was borne in upon me that the man had died there and lay beyond human help. Once more I was pulled ashore and ventured a bit up the gorge, but not very far. Evil hung thickly in the air up there and something told me that eyes were watching. Not a sound or sight mind you; but just unseen things waiting for me to make a false step."

"Far up the gorge I did hear a noise presently—a deep hissing like a spouting of a whale. It came and went, and I remembered Ben had told me a hot spring that shot up every five minutes. And then, with my weather eye lifting I thought I saw a movement on the cliffs over my head and some nameless creatures looked to be coming down the ropes. That was enough for me and I turned tail so fast as I might and got back in the boat. Then we took 't'other in tow and pulled for the Condor."

"That's the end of the tale, and the end of Benny no doubt. All fifty years old and more now. Very disappointing for me, because he had promised me a handsome gift when we were back again at La Floreana."

Aylmer dived in his pocket and brought out a stout wad of paper money "There's something anyway," he said "You've told us a lot worth knowing, my friend, and when we come back again perhaps we shall tell you a little more yet."

"Very disappointing," echoed the old man, and they saw that the shutters were down and he was falling asleep. He murmured a little longer and they put their gift into his hand and prepared to leave him.

But just as Jane and Tom departed Pedro opened his eyes. It seemed that the touch of the notes had awakened him.

"Then he tucked the money into his bosom and went to sleep again. (To be continued)

Halifax Herald: An Ottawa newspaper story says: "The Maritimers make up the most taciturn group in the Commons." If by "taciturn" is meant "habitually silent," then the observation contains a considerable degree of truth. Time was when Maritime members were as vocal as any others, but in recent years a strange silence has fallen over most of them. In their majority they get themselves elected—and then appear to lose their powers of speech. There are, of course, certain notable exceptions; but, by and large, the term "taciturn" is not ill applied.

Chatham Dealer Turns "Trade-ins" Out on Farm

Chatham, June 17—(Special despatch)—When most automobile dealers accept a trade-in on a new motor car, they put it on their used car lot. But Leo Wildgen, prominent Chatham dealer, turns his trade-ins out to graze in his farm. He's the only Ontario dealer on record who takes livestock as down payment on new motor cars—and he's been doing it for nineteen years.

Mr. Wildgen is married, has four boys, one girl, 18 head of cattle, 90 hogs, 17 brood sows, 8 horses, a 300-acre farm under cultivation and a well-equipped garage on Wellington Street, with a staff of 12. He has been a General Motors dealer for a number of years, handling McLaughlin-Buick and Pontiac cars and GMC trucks.

His wide and varied experience enables him to talk the language of farmer and automobile dealer alike. At one time he roamed the Western plains and was a head stockman on a ranch at North Battleford, and he gained his first insight into the automobile industry with the old Gray Dort Company.

"I've been doing this since 1920," he said, "the first of May, 1920. At that time, I was selling only used cars. I remained in the used car business for six years before selling Star and Durant cars. It seems to me that I've always known livestock. And I'll tell you something—livestock's a liquid stock. I'd rather have cows, horses, hogs, or chickens as down payments on cars than I would a bad note. I can always sell livestock for cash."

Leaning back in his swivel chair, Mr. Wildgen proceeded to outline other business advantages of this practice. "Here's how it works out," he explained. "A farmer may want to buy a new McLaughlin-Buick or Pontiac, but he has a few head of surplus livestock which he wants to turn into cash first. Instead of having to wait for perhaps six weeks before he can make a deal, he'll come down to me and kill two birds with one stone, as it were, for I'll allow him the value of his livestock as a down payment on the car he wants. As a result, the farmer has sold his livestock and secured his car at the same time."

Horses, according to Mr. Wildgen

It's the refreshing thing to do



B-81 TIMMINS BOTTLING WORKS Phone 646-J 63 Birch Street North Timmins

have a trade-in value of anywhere from \$75 to \$175, while cows will bring from \$40 to \$100. Sometimes, Mr. Wildgen will turn his livestock into cash right away. On other occasions, he will keep them for a time and hold an auction sale once or twice a year. At his recent spring sale, Mr. Wildgen estimated that he would take in \$2,330. He realized \$2,360!

Which goes to prove that he knows his livestock and why he has achieved such marked success in conducting his business on this unique basis.

THE STAMP OF QUALITY



Gutta Percha Tires are sold and recommended by: MATTAGAMI SERVICE STATION, Mountjoy Street MONETA SERVICE STATION—152 Pine Street South SUBWAY SERVICE STATION—Schumacher Highway FRED LAFOREST—127 Golden Avenue, South Porcupine

GUTTA PERCHA TIRES

OLDS OWNERS "HAVE EVERYTHING"



Illustrated—Oldsmobile "Select Six" coach with Trunk

OLDSMOBILE "SELECT SIX" "SEVENTY" "EIGHTY"

LET your eye take in the stunning L Style Leader beauty of this new Olds "Select Six"... check up on the extra features it offers... sample its thrilling 95-h.p. performance... and look at its new low price tag! Then you'll know why we say Oldsmobile owners "have everything" for fine-car motoring at small-car cost! This new Olds, priced just above the lowest, gives you everything for style, comfort, performance, safety... See it at our showrooms today. Go for a Ride—and you'll go for an Oldsmobile.



Low monthly payments on the General Motors installment Plan

MARSHALL-ECCLESTONE LIMITED Phone 229 Showrooms, 7 Third Ave. Timmins

YOUR OLDSMOBILE DEALER . . . SERVICE PLUS RELIABILITY

"I'VE EATEN SHREDDED WHEAT FOR 40 YEARS AND FEEL LIKE A YOUNGSTER"



SHREDDED WHEAT is made from 100% whole wheat—nothing added nor taken away—and contains a good balance of vitamins, proteins, carbohydrates, mineral salts . . . and bran. That's why Shredded Wheat makes a tempting and delicious, nutritious daily dish that helps older people keep in step with vigorous youth. Look for the familiar package at your food store.

The Canadian Shredded Wheat Company, Ltd. Niagara Falls, Canada

Eat 12 big biscuits in every box

SHREDDED WHEAT MADE IN CANADA - OF CANADIAN WHEAT