

Elopers Pursued by Malay Pirates and Rescued by a Warship

THE story of the elopement of a French officer, the pursuit of his yacht and his bride by Malay pirates, and their rescue by a French cruiser after a chase of many miles through the islands which dot the stretch of sea between Sumatra and Borneo, is not set down in the official reports filed with the ministry of the marine at Paris. There are some things that even French naval records conceal, and a romance is not supposed to have a place in the archives of France.

Henri Bergerac Villeneuve, a lieutenant in the customs marine service and stationed at Saigon, the capital of French Indo-China, since May, 1903, was in love with Marie Clochet, the daughter of a wealthy exporter and merchant whose coasting steamers and sailing vessels plied the waters between Saigon, Bangkok, Tonquin, Singapore, Batavia, and Acheen. Old Clochet was inordinately proud of his navy, as he called it. He had his own flag, and he was so wealthy and so influential that his flag was accorded a half-official salute in most of the native ports where his vessels touched. Clochet has been engaged in the oriental trade for twenty-three years. His agents are in every port. He deals in teakwood from the forests of the upper Mekong river in Siam, silks and tea from Hongkong and Canton, opium from Macao, and coffee, cotton, and sugar cane from Java and Borneo. He is as secretive as he is proud and conceals the identity of his business under a score of names, firms, and corporations. Few persons know Clochet. In Singapore, in Bangkok, in Hongkong, in Batavia, his individuality is merged into a dozen different names.

Plans Marriage of Daughter.

It has been Clochet's ambition to retire from active business at the end of twenty-five years and return to France, marry his only daughter, Marie, to a French marquis, settle upon her a magnificent chateau, and live the remainder of

afternoon. What was more natural than that the swift revenue service cutter, commanded by Lieut. Villeneuve, should be waiting under steam in the bay?

Out in the bay, three miles from shore, a signal fluttered to the masthead of the revenue cutter. An answering pennant flew to the foretop of the yacht's mainmast, and the sailing craft lay to, awaiting a boat from the revenue cutter. Lieut. Villeneuve went on board the yacht, his boat returned to the cutter. Capt. Melvor of the yacht made all sail—and the elopement began.

Elopers Start for Singapore.

The yacht was headed straight across the China sea to Singapore, 1,000 miles as the gull flies; but the weather was fine, the breeze a stiff one, and the sea like a bowl of placid, azure cream. Capt. Melvor declared he would land the lovers at Singapore, at the door of the French consulate, in three days and nights, and all went well.

Back in Saigon old Clochet suspected nothing until evening; then he discovered—no one knows how—the elopement. By that time the lovers had eight hours' start. It was two hours more before Clochet could get any clew to the possible course taken by his yacht. It was midnight before he left Saigon on the swiftest steamer of his merchant fleet. He knew that the elopers had sailed southward and guessed that they had started for Singapore.

The elopement began on Monday afternoon. Tuesday afternoon Clochet and his steamer were midway between The Brothers Islands, 100 miles south of Saigon, and North Natunas Island, 400 miles south. Of course, the yacht had not been sighted. This fact caused but little anxiety, however, because old Clochet knew that his steamer would arrive at Singapore hours ahead of the sailing vessel in spite of its twelve hours' start. But Clochet was more anxious about the state of the weather, which was gradually but certainly becoming threatening.

Tuesday night the steamer ran through a squall, and by Wednesday morning the wind was blowing from the northwest. With the wind came lowering banks of dun yellow clouds and a driving mist of rain that hid all objects from view.

Thursday forenoon the steamer crossed the bows of a French cruiser and checked its course in response to signals that an officer was coming on board. When the naval officer arrived he told a story that wrung old Clochet's soul with anguish.

Lovers Pursued by Pirates.

Briefly, this is what the French officer disclosed: Eight hours before, in the early dawn, while cruising northward through the half gale, the lookout descried a man in the sea clinging to a spar. The man, when taken on board, proved to be none other than Capt. Melvor.

Clochet, in despair for the safety of his daughter, hurried on board the cruiser to learn Melvor's story. When he had heard it his despair increased. Melvor's story was soon told. The yacht with the lovers on board had kept pace with the breeze all Monday and Tuesday without a mishap to mar the happiness of the lovers. Tuesday night, in the moonlight, a strange sail was observed to the leeward, and, half an hour later, another on the port side. Both strangers were recognized as native luggers by the huge square sails. But the sea was known to be full of native luggers, and Melvor thought little of the two craft that kept pace with his yacht on either side.

teatious. One glance at the anxious faces of the canny old Scot and her lover, and a quick sweep of the sea showing the pirate luggers in pursuit, revealed the awful truth. From that moment Marie Clochet refused to leave the deck.

Captain Is Knocked Overboard.

Late Wednesday afternoon, while at a particularly dangerous moment, when the luggers were closer to their prey than they had been at any time during the day's chase, Melvor gave a sharp order to the man at the wheel. In response to the order the man brought the helm hard over, and as the yacht swerved to the lee side a sudden gust of the wind swung the main boom across the deck. Melvor ducked too late, and in another breath found himself struggling in the sea, half stunned.

That was all that Melvor could tell old Clochet. The yacht and the pursuers disappeared to the eastward in the gloom of the mist. Whether the yacht had been captured or not the Scotchman could not guess.

Pursuit of Pirates Begins.

Clochet and the commander of the cruiser made their plans hurriedly. Clochet, with his own steamer, was to crowd on all speed and steam to the westward of Great Natunas Island, sweep southward and the westward to the South Natunas group. The cruiser, on the other side, was to make all possible steam through the channel between the Natunas and Anamasa Islands and proceed to the eastward. Thus the steamer would get in front of the yacht and its pursuers, while the cruiser would come up behind them. If the weather cleared they were almost certain to sight the yacht and the luggers.

Then the chase began. Clochet's steamer had the greater distance to go, but it was a speedier craft than the cruiser. Therefore they met Friday afternoon south of Great Natunas Island, neither having sighted the yacht or its pur-



Marie Clochet



Henri Villeneuve

his days in quiet enjoyment.

No wonder, then, that old man Clochet flew into a towering rage when he discovered that his daughter Marie, whom he had dreamed of as a future marchioness, had fallen in love with an officer of the customs marine—and a penniless one at that—without even the hope of ever being an admiral in the French navy.

One day Marie Clochet managed to see Lieut. Henri Villeneuve at the home of a mutual friend and told him that her father was sending her to France by the next steamer.

An elopement was decided upon; but where could the lovers elope to, and how?

Marie Clochet was as resourceful as she was beautiful, and Lieut. Henri was equal to any emergency. Therefore, one afternoon last October, Marie obtained permission from her father to go for a sail on his sailing yacht, the handsomest and swiftest craft of its size under sail in the orient. With her was her maid. The captain of the yacht was her father's trusted agent, but he was a canny old Scotchman and he was also a friend of old Clochet's daughter and Henri Villeneuve.

The yacht stood out from the harbor of Saigon on a bright

When Wednesday's dawn struggled through the dimness of cloud and misty rain Melvor noticed that the luggers had drawn much nearer to him. At that instant the thought of Malay pirates flashed into the Scotch captain's mind. In an instant his perilous situation was borne in on him with terrible force. His yacht, with his employer's daughter on board—and only a score of sailors to defend her. On the Malay luggers doubtless were 200 or 300 armed men.

Despairing Race with Pirates.

Then began a race seldom witnessed at sea. Melvor, without alarming Miss Clochet, called Lieut. Villeneuve above deck, assembled all of his crew except the man at the wheel, pointed to the pirate luggers, and in the briefest sentences possible explained the danger, which was only too apparent. Then every man went to his place. The sturdy Scotchman knew his yacht as a father does his own child. He knew to a nicety just what the yacht would do in answer to the slightest pressure of the helm. He knew to a stitch just how much sail the masts and yards could carry. He resolved, therefore, to outmaneuver the pirates even if he could not hope to outsail them.

Time and again the luggers tried to close in on the yacht. Every time, however, the yacht was turned this way or that, each time sweeping clear of one or the other of the luggers that alternately threw themselves across the pathway of the little vessel or tried to get close enough to cast a grappling line on board.

This fearful game of tag continued for hour after hour. Marie Clochet, from her cabin below decks, suspected that something was wrong, and, without saying a word, quietly made her way up the companion ladder and gained the deck before Capt. Melvor or Lieut. Villeneuve guessed of her in-

ters. They turned southward, keeping a sharp lookout. All Friday night they steamed. Saturday morning the cruiser's lookout sighted the sailboats and the commander from the bridge easily made out the yacht with his glass.

The cruiser put on all steam and rapidly overhauled the sailing vessels. Some master hand on the yacht was managing the vessel with the same keen eye and firm hand that had been Melvor's. Whose hand was it? Who had the courage, the endurance, the audacity to take hairbreadth chances?

By 10 o'clock Saturday morning the cruiser was near enough to send a shell from its five centimeter guns through the sails of the nearest pirate lugger. That ended the chase. Up to the instant the gun had been fired the pirates had been so intent in following the yacht that they had not noticed the swift approach of the cruiser. When the five centimeter shell brought the mainsail of the lugger to the deck there was a wild panic to get away. But the sea was smooth and the cruiser's guns had the range.

Of course it was Lieut. Villeneuve who had taken command of the yacht after Melvor had been swept overboard, and it was his seamanship and courage that had kept the vessel out of the hands of the Malays. Old Clochet had to forgive his daughter for eloping and he had to consent to an immediate marriage. Only now Lieut. Villeneuve is the managing director of old Clochet's merchant fleet and Melvor still commands the yacht.