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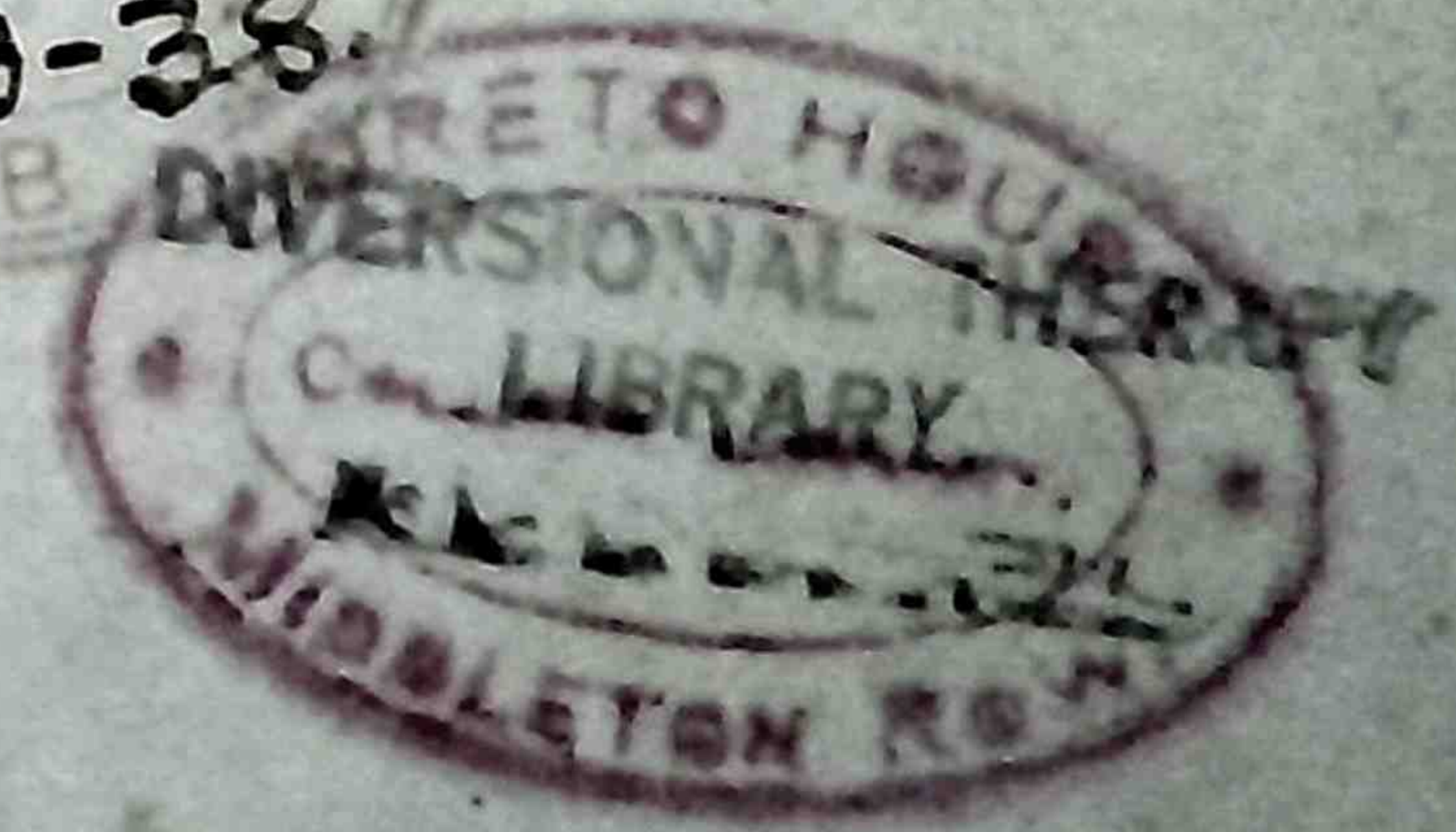
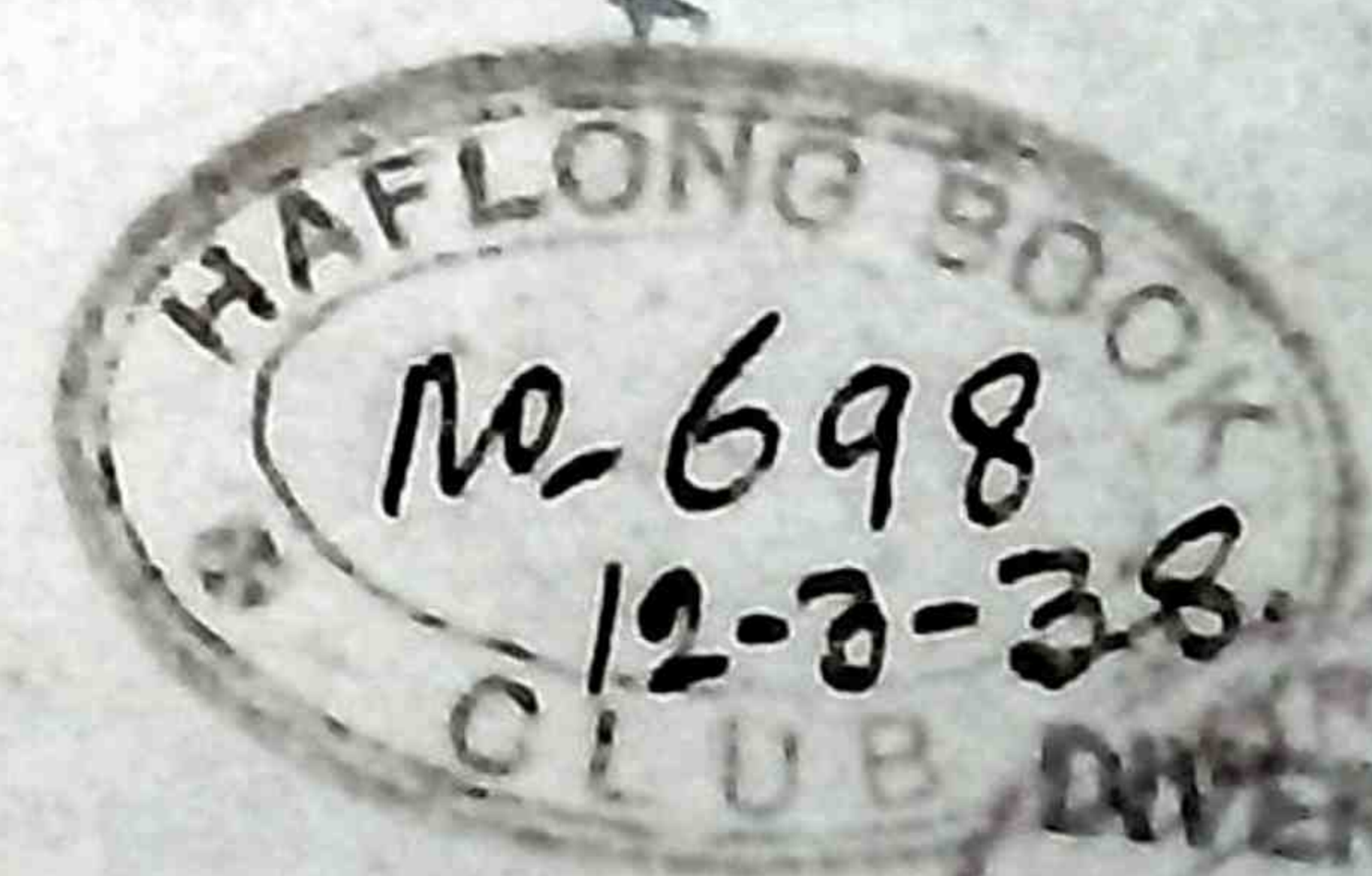
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THE "KÖNIGSBERG" ADVENTURE



BOOKS ON THE SEA  
BY  
E. KEBLE CHATTERTON

SAILING SHIPS AND THEIR STORY  
SHIPS AND WAYS OF OTHER DAYS  
FORE AND AFT: THE STORY OF THE FORE  
AND AFT RIG  
THE STORY OF THE BRITISH NAVY  
KING'S CUTTERS AND SMUGGLERS  
STEAMSHIPS AND THEIR STORY  
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THE ROMANCE OF PIRACY  
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ENGLISH SEAMEN AND THE COLONISATION OF  
AMERICA  
THE SEA-RAIDERS  
SAILING THE SEAS  
GALLANT GENTLEMEN

*CRUISES*

DOWN CHANNEL IN THE *VIVETTE*  
THROUGH HOLLAND IN THE *VIVETTE*

# THE "KÖNIGSBERG" ADVENTURE *(GWB Cat)*

21

By  
**E. KEBLE CHATTERTON**

AUTHOR OF  
"THE SEA-RAIDERS," "GALLANT GENTLEMEN"

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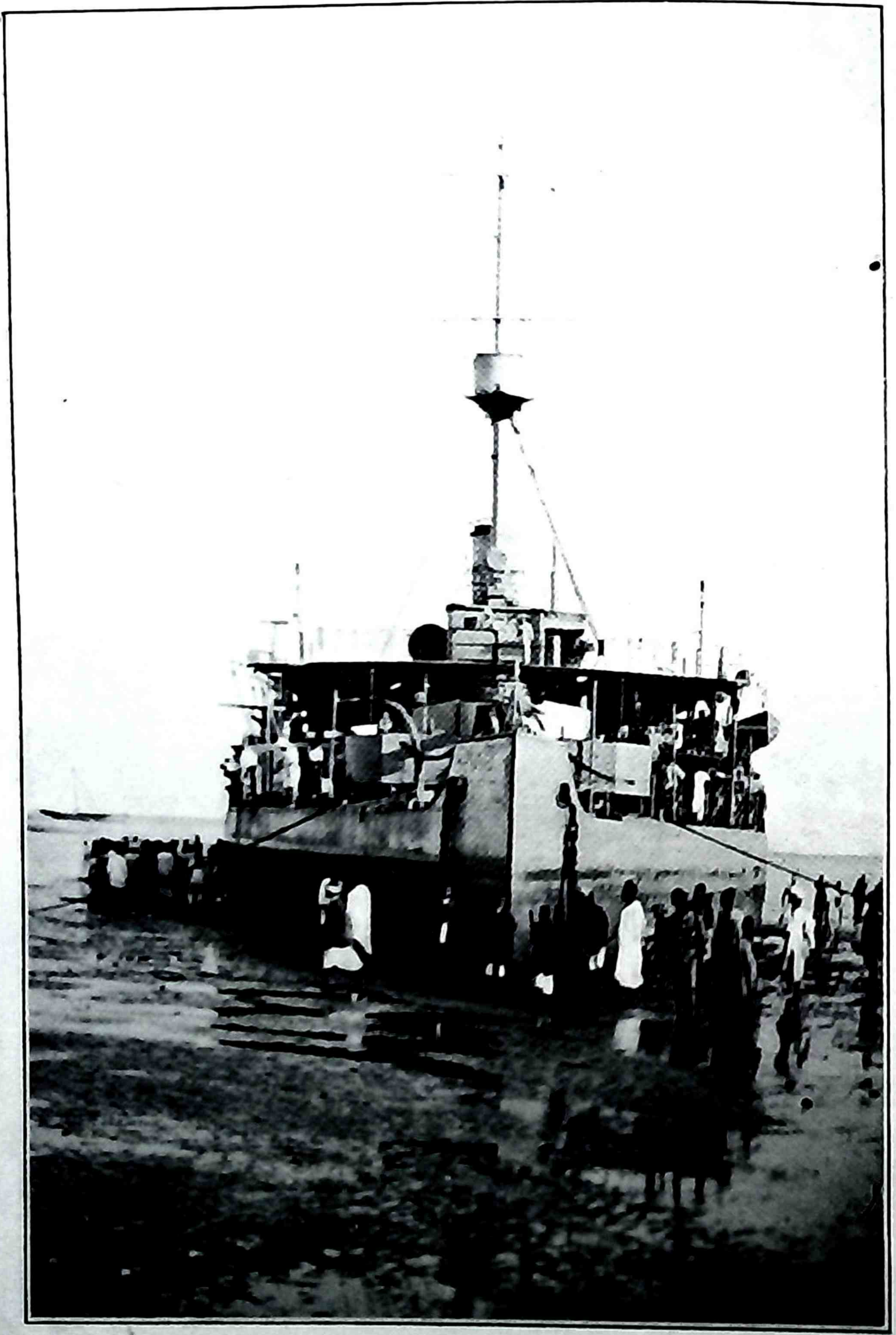
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H.M.S. SEVERN

After her action with the German cruiser *Königsberg*, the British monitor is seen beached on the mud at Zanzibar for her sides to be cleaned. Observe her shallow draught.

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## PREFACE

THE following chapters represent the first attempt to publish a full and separate account of a rare adventure. Shortly after the War began, considerable public interest was aroused by the escape and concealment of the German cruiser *Königsberg*, but in those censored days it was never possible to get a clear account of what really happened; and not till very recently have all the complicated facts, the explanatory details, the missing motives, become available for a proper understanding of a difficult and fascinating campaign.

I have been fortunate to be given access to a considerable amount of invaluable information belonging to that period; and to have the personal records of those who played conspicuous parts in solving the *Königsberg* riddle. On such original matter of the greatest historical importance, supplemented by verbal communications, I have for the most part constructed the following narrative. Most manuscripts nowadays are, more accurately, typescripts, and this is the first age when irreplaceable documents have begun to fade at an alarming rate. The old days of pen-and-ink written MSS. have departed, yet there was a far greater permanence in their production. To-day, after only seventeen or eighteen years, type-written records and letters of the War period become fainter as the months speed by; and for that, if for no other reason, it is the duty of this generation to extract the truth before too late.

I cannot sufficiently express my sense of obligation to the immense assistance which has been given me by Vice-Admiral Sidney R. Drury-Lowe, C.M.G., who carried out the great task of organising the search for

the *Königsberg* and bottling her up inside the African river. To Group-Captain J. T. Cull, D.S.O., R.A.F., I am very greatly indebted for the information covering the work so brilliantly performed by the Air Service, which caused the enemy to abandon their ship after the hottest duel. A list of further authorities will be found on another page.

It is a pleasure once more to acknowledge the courtesy of the Imperial War Museum both in regard to many of the photographs here reproduced, and in other respects. Both Admiral Drury-Lowe and Group-Captain Cull have also been good enough to allow a number of their illustrations to appear in the following pages. The opportunity has been appreciated all the more, seeing that in some cases these are the only pictorial records, and the original negatives do not all exist to-day.

E. KEBLE CHATTERTON.

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**THE  
"KÖNIGSBERG" ADVENTURE**

CHAPTER I

PRELUDE TO ADVENTURE

ONE of the most fascinating studies is to watch the effects of suspense and uncertainty on human mentality. In the theatre the dramatist well realises nothing is so sure of maintaining his audience's attention as that which incites curiosity by keeping the result of some great issue in a state of delay. In the realm of the Press is appreciated the fact that few items from day to day so hold the readers' interest as the search for one who has committed a daring deed and got clean away, leaving behind only the slenderest of clues. And the enormous consumption to-day of what is known as "detective fiction"; the anxiety to know the result of some important athletic contest; can be traced to the psychological characteristic that we remain ill at ease and unsatisfied until convinced of ultimate solutions. Inquisitiveness is less a failing than a desire to be relieved of further uncertainty.

Now one of the most prolonged instances of suspense afloat, combining mystery and doubtful fate right till the end, embracing also the frailest clues and the wildest of rumours, with the threat of great possibilities impending all the time, had for its scene the East African coast. And we have before us as fine a

mystery narrative as ever the imagination could demand, with the most uninhabited and little-known scenery for the background, where few ships had ever steamed and little cartographical knowledge had ever been obtained. Contrasted with all this primitive environment of mangrove swamps, reefs, islands, uncharted channels and dense jungle, there come the modern developments of fast ships, airplanes, wireless; together with the intrigues of spies and the performance of most heroic adventures.

The story begins on July 27, 1914, when the Cape of Good Hope Squadron, under the command of Rear-Admiral Herbert King-Hall, during its cruise chanced to be at the island of Mauritius. Such were the alarming reports which arrived of the approaching European situation that Admiral King-Hall took his ships to sea that afternoon bound for Zanzibar. These units were but three in number, and were neither fast nor modern. His flagship was the *Hyacinth*, a cruiser of 5600 tons that was already thirteen years old and had never done better speed than 21 knots. She was armed with eleven 6-inch and eight 3-inch guns. The *Astræa* was older still, having been completed as far back as 1894. She was of 4360 tons, but armed with two 6-inch and eight 4.7's, and her best speed was less than 20 knots. Finally there was the *Pegasus* of only 2135 tons, 20 to 21 knots, and an armament of eight 4-inch. She dated from 1899.

There was thus no homogeneity about this old-fashioned trio, but the pre-war situation had not required that the latest and best British cruisers should be allocated to a station which extended as far west and north as St. Helena; as far east and north as to include the whole of East Africa and its outlying islands. Within this area were only two German men-of-war: the gunboat *Eber* and the protected cruiser *Königsberg*. The former was of but slight fighting value, and just before the declaration of war she steamed away from South Africa across the South Atlantic. Her subsequent career has already been

noted,<sup>1</sup> and we need not trouble to think of her again.

But the *Königsberg* was a reason for serious consideration. She was only seven years old, had been known to steam at over 24 knots, and was armed with ten 4.1-inch guns. This 3350-ton cruiser was a sister ship of the *Nürnberg* which was to be one of von Spee's squadron at the Battle of Coronel, whose 4.1-inch guns sank H.M.S. *Monmouth*. At the Battle of the Falklands she was in turn sunk by H.M.S. *Kent*, but only after a hot chase of 200 miles and her 4.1-inch guns had consistently outranged the 6-inch guns of *Kent*. There can be no question as to the *Königsberg's* superiority over any of the three British African cruisers: she could have kept them at her chosen distance in any engagement, and then outranged them. Alternatively she was possessed of at least 3 knots higher speed which would enable her to decline battle.

Based on Dar-es-Salaam, the capital of German East Africa, which was not merely an important military station but a great trading centre, the *Königsberg* with her three tall funnels and lithe slim hull was a source of pride to German colonials, and of no little awe to the natives. But to the British naval mind her situation so close to the steamship routes, running up from Capetown and Natal to Zanzibar and the Suez Canal, was to suggest a grave menace. Further eastward, well out on the Indian Ocean, there is a veritable spider's web of shipping lines from Australia, Java, Malacca Straits, China, Singapore, Calcutta, Ceylon, Bombay, Mauritius; whilst at the north and west the approaches to Aden were ripe possibilities if the *Königsberg* escaped to go raiding. And for this precise purpose she was particularly suited.

It was quite obvious, then, that before war should be declared the British cruisers should definitely locate *Königsberg's* whereabouts, and be ready to counteract her future hostile activities. Zanzibar, by reason of its proximity to Dar-es-Salaam, was clearly the station

<sup>1</sup> See my *The Sea-Raiders*.

to make for at present, and on the voyage there was an opportunity for Admiral King-Hall to get the Cape Squadron into fighting trim. Hands were busy, in spite of the awkward heavy swell of the Indian Ocean, changing the beautiful white enamelled topsides to a dull flat colour of naval grey paint. It was farewell to leisured steaming, to pleasant visits, hospitable entertainments, picnics: the political situation was already tense. The fatal wireless signal might come through at any moment now.

But cruising means coaling, and it was a peculiarity of the Cape station that the use of Welsh coal for His Majesty's ships was forbidden: by an Admiralty order the fuel was to be either patent blocks or else coal from the Natal collieries. Neither of this was satisfactory, for it fouled the ships' boilers and caused considerable loss of speed to a squadron already slow enough. A call was made at Diego Suarez, which is at the north end of Madagascar and on the route to Zanzibar, but here no coal was available, so the latter stage of this voyage found the cruisers all too short of the wherewithal for chasing any fast German raider, whether genuine man-of-war or converted merchantman. The steamers of the German East Afrika Line that might chance to be in Dar-es-Salaam would certainly be expected to be sent along the trade routes waylaying British and French liners.

There was enough cause for anxiety during these last of the preliminary days, but the first thrilling moment arrived after sunset on July 31. Admiral King-Hall crossed the intervening sea between Madagascar and the African continent, and his voyage was nearly completed. He had detached the *Astræa* and *Pegasus* with orders to watch Dar-es-Salaam, where the *Königsberg* might probably be at anchor, though this could not be certain. The *Hyacinth* was now steaming alone, and news came from the *Pegasus* that *Königsberg* was somewhere at sea. Darkness fell upon the tropical waves, the moon rose, and suddenly on the *Hyacinth's* starboard bow a strange vessel loomed up

in the faint light. Steamer of sorts! Warship! German—definitely the *Königsberg* herself!

The occasion was rich in suspense. What was about to happen? Night action? And the *Hyacinth* short of coal? Had war been declared? Both the *Hyacinth* and *Königsberg* thought it possible the other knew hostilities had begun: yet each hesitated to open fire. Both cruisers were darkened, with crews at action stations; and the first ship to fire its salvo would break the uncertainty. Those were exciting, breathless moments, for the two silent foes-to-be passed each other at only 3000 yards distance.

But the tension passed almost as quickly as it had begun. The *Königsberg* was playing only the first episode in a long game: she was required for other duties presently than to fight a duel with the *Hyacinth*, and she took full advantage of those extra knots which she so splendidly possessed. "On sighting us," relates Admiral King-Hall, "she bolted off at full speed and . . . soon disappeared out of sight." So what with the British flagship being by nature slower, short of fuel, and allowed only inferior coal at that, it was impossible to shadow her. This statement cannot be stressed too heavily. We were within four days of the Great War, the one German cruiser off the whole East African coast had been sighted, and we had three cruisers to dog her steps. Instead of being able to blockade her or sink her on August 5, we had allowed her to get away into space, sink our ships, create immense anxiety, and keep our forces at sea for month after month hunting her down. The material and strategical cost was beyond all calculation. At a time when overseas shipping was being endangered by raiders and our light cruisers were so badly needed for escort and ocean patrol, the elusive *Königsberg* was able to keep them on the alert day and night for the one purpose of her destruction; whereas two of our modern cruisers, with plenty of good coal, during those fateful four days could have settled the *Königsberg's* career and saved the British nation millions of pounds.

Early in the morning of August 1 the *Hyacinth* reached Zanzibar, coaled, and then hurried south to the Cape of Good Hope, as the only naval strength there consisted of two torpedo-boats already thirty years old. The *Astræa* and *Pegasus* were left behind, though it is difficult to imagine what good they would have been collectively against the *Königsberg* except at close range; and this the fast German would never have permitted. Individually, the two British cruisers would not have had even a sporting chance: the enemy would have done what she liked with either.

However, whilst the *Astræa* busied herself on August 8 at Dar-es-Salaam destroying the German wireless station, she was luckily not fallen upon. She certainly caused alarm to the enemy in bombarding that port, insomuch that the Germans sought to protect themselves by now sinking their floating dock across the harbour entrance. But whilst this afforded a measure of security, it not merely robbed the *Königsberg* of the very base outside which she had been sighted a week previously; but it shut in several fine German steamers, of which one was the 8000-ton East Afrika Company's *Tabora*. This was a typical Teutonic liner of the multiple-deck type, with one funnel and two masts, and had arrived off the coast only a few days since. She was thus prevented from being employed as an auxiliary cruiser.

The *Astræa* and *Pegasus* during the first part of August both continued to steam about in the hope of finding the *Königsberg*, but without success; for the latter had indeed vanished right away from this region and cleverly gone north up the coast till she reached that approach to the Gulf of Aden where so many lanes of steamship traffic—from Karachi, Bombay, Colombo, the East Indies, China, Australia and South Africa—meet the traffic coming down the Red Sea from the Suez Canal. That is to say the German cruiser chose out a focal point where she could be absolutely sure of finding a victim merchantman, though it would be dangerous to hang about in such a busy locality for too

long. On August 6 she was rewarded, when 280 miles east of Aden, by the appearance of the British S.S. *City of Winchester* (6601 tons) bound from Colombo to England, and thus the very first capture during the War of a British merchant vessel by the enemy took place within two days of hostilities commencing. But the incident was kept secret for a fortnight, and the *City of Winchester* had not been immediately sunk. A whole week passed during which the raider helped herself to coal and provisions, then finally scuttled her, and, after placing the prisoners in other German steamers, once more made her disappearance.

By August 24 the *Astræa* had been called away from the East African area and was engaged in convoying duties, thus leaving the *Pegasus* alone. If, therefore, the *Königsberg* should decide to revisit her peace-time region that was so familiar to her, she would have quite a fair chance of wiping out the sole British cruiser provided a certain amount of trouble were taken. Perhaps by means of careful staff work and sound naval intelligence based on espionage it would be possible to employ darkness for springing a surprise. In any case her ten modern 4.1-inch guns and superior speed would be more than a match for the eight-year-old 4-inch guns of the obsolete *Pegasus*.

It is undeniable that the *Königsberg* played her rôle with ability. She had created a crisis, as sudden as it was disturbing, by demonstrating the necessity for our cruisers in the protection of trade routes; and she had then resumed her cloak of mystery. What had become of her? Whither had she steamed? Week after week went by, and still she was unreported. On what plan of campaign was she working? The most reasonable appreciation seemed to suggest that she would continue to harry merchantmen but probably many hundreds of miles further to the east—perhaps near Sumatra—and all sorts of rumours concerning her having been sighted soon began to be spread. But would she reappear off the Zanzibar neighbourhood? On the whole, having regard to the loss of her Dar-es-Salaam

base, it was far more likely that she would frequent Oriental trade routes and keep well distant from East Africa. Her normal coal capacity was 400 tons, and her maximum stowage was more than twice that amount. She could go on refuelling from her prizes and maintain a normal radius of more than 5000 knots. It is true that she had over 300 officers and men to feed, but here again the well-stocked merchant steamers would supply her needs.

September came and still there was no information of *Königsberg*, but on the 10th began those startling raids by the German cruiser *Emden* in the Bay of Bengal, whereby within five days half a dozen vessels had been captured and before the month's end more were to follow. Such exploits still more seemed to indicate that the *Königsberg* was somewhere on the trade routes awaiting similar opportunities: it was in fact rumoured that she was co-operating with the *Emden*.

But all theories and suppositions were with dramatic suddenness swept aside when, after seven weeks' mysterious silence, the *Königsberg* in the early morning of September 20 showed herself—not at the eastern side of the Indian Ocean, but in her original waters, and not far from where she had been sighted in the moonlight of July 31.

So, with no little skill, her captain had kept her foes badly guessing and (when least expected) he pounced upon the *Pegasus*, destroyed her without delay, and once more vanished utterly into the unknown. The *City of Winchester's* loss had been a material disaster of some hundreds of thousands of pounds: but the sinking of even an obsolete cruiser belonging to His Majesty's Navy, and under such special circumstances, was a moral misfortune that called for immediate and drastic action. The necessity of finding the *Königsberg* and wiping her off the sea became of paramount importance, and no expense was to be spared, no relaxation permitted, until this culprit should have been hunted to death.

This, then, is the high adventure that we are about to follow through all its complexities and ramifications, the false and true clues, the checked chase, till the final kill. The culprit is the *Königsberg*, the victims are the two vessels just mentioned, the detectives and police are the naval officers and men aboard fast-steaming cruisers called in to concentrate on a difficult and hazardous quest. All sorts of supernumeraries join in the exciting drama, and from small beginnings great happenings develop, culminating in one tremendous climax.

But first let us see for ourselves exactly the circumstances of that tragedy which occurred on September 20.