

this position as stationary and motionless as the branch upon which it is perched; if, however, it becomes fairly alarmed, it takes a horizontal but laborious flight for about a hundred yards, with its legs hanging down as if broken.

The head and crest of the mound-making megapode are of a deep cinnamon-brown. The back of the neck

and all the under surface dark grey. Back and wings cinnamon-brown; tail-coverts dark chestnut; bill reddish-brown. Tarsi bright orange, with the exception of those of the toes, which are dark reddish-brown.

The kagu is an inhabitant of the island of New Caledonia, and bears some relationship to the cranes and bitterns.



THE STOLEN STEAMSHIP.

CORRESPONDENT of the *Times*, writing from Melbourne, relates the detection of one of the most ingenious and artfully-planned enterprises ever attempted in the wholesale stealing and swindling line.

"To begin at the beginning, it is necessary to state that some time back information was forwarded from Scotland to the Australian and other ports touching the mysterious disappearance from the Clyde of a steamer named the *Ferret*. The fact was announced under the curious form of 'Vessel lost, stolen, or strayed from the Clyde;' and in a Glasgow evening paper of February 12th an account of the transaction was given in substance as follows:—

In October last a man calling himself Walker—an ominous name in the minds of some foolish people—called on a leading ship chandlers' firm in Glasgow, professing to be a broker for a gentleman who contemplated taking for the health of his wife a six months' yachting cruise, and required the ship's stores necessary for the purpose. Satisfactory references were, as usual, required, and given. 'The vessel,' Walker said, 'had been chartered from the Highland Railway Company, and the charterer was alluded to as, although not expressly

stated to be, a Mr. Smith, a relative of the late First Lord of the Admiralty. The vessel, a steamer named the *Ferret*, was undergoing an overhaul in the yard of Messrs. Thomson, of Glasgow, preparatory to the projected trip, and the required goods, including an excellent supply of first-class wines from London, were duly delivered. The account, amounting to £1,490, was presented to Walker, who, it is said, gave his bill at three months' date, the signature of the Mr. Smith being also asked for and given. The bank, a London one, at which the bill was made payable, had been communicated with, and had replied that the acceptor of the bill had an account there. On the 16th of January last, before the maturity of the bill, the holders received some information which made them uneasy, and on the presentation of the bill when due it was dishonoured, the acceptor having previously withdrawn both his balance and himself. The 'references' were then attempted to be communicated with, but they had disappeared also.

Inquiries were, of course, next made about the *Ferret*. It appeared that on leaving the Clyde she had steamed south to Cardiff by the aid of a crew of 'runners,' who had there left her, the reputed owner, the captain, and some other officers alone remaining. A new crew and a fresh supply of coal having been

shipped, she departed on her cruise, the nature of which will appear presently. The perplexed and unfortunate merchants who had supplied the goods, not being able to learn anything as to the whereabouts or destination of the vessel, next applied for information to the Highland Railway Company, from whom the vessel had been chartered, and were answered through their secretary as follows:—‘That they had already done all in their power to trace the *Ferret*, having got no charter-money from the parties since they sailed from Glasgow; that they had been in communication with Lloyd’s and the Board of Trade, and that through Lloyd’s agents and the British Consuls inquiries had been made all over the world; that about ten days before they had heard that the vessel was at Malta, but on telegraphing there a reply had come that she had not arrived; that they had ordered her to be stopped at Malta, should she put in there, and that any information regarding her would be made known to the merchants; concluding that altogether it had been a very mysterious affair.’

Here was all that could be discoverable at home, and a very mysterious affair it remained until cleared up to a considerable extent in the Melbourne Police Office within the last few days. How the case got there, and what discoveries were there and elsewhere subsequently made, I now proceed shortly to state.

The communications with Lloyd’s agents and with the Consuls at distant ports had not been without effect. The notices which had appeared in the newspapers had attracted the attention of the authorities in various ports. On the 20th of last month a steamer, corresponding in tonnage with that of the missing vessel, entered our bay, bearing the name of the *India*. A constable named Davidson, stationed at Queenscliff, at the entrance of Port Philip, on seeing the vessel, conceived the suspicion—

founded on her appearance corresponding with the descriptions he had read—that the visitor was no other than the *Ferret*. Within a very few days certain circumstances connected with the conduct of the officers and crew strengthened the suspicions of the police that there was at any rate ‘something wrong’ about this vessel. It was observed that the captain never left her; that the men were never allowed ‘leave on shore;’ and that the fires were always so fed that steam could be got up at the shortest notice. An officer of Customs, having been specially instructed to make further inquiry, ascertained that no steamer of the tonnage of this vessel (346 tons) was registered at Lloyd’s in the name of the *India*; but a steamer bearing the name of the *Ferret* of this tonnage was on the register. Noting all these suspicious circumstances, the Customs authorities determined on prompt action.

Accordingly, on the 27th ult., the vessel was seized by the Commissioner of Customs, accompanied, in case of resistance, by two crews of the water police, no opposition being attempted by either officers or crew of the vessel. A merely cursory examination of the steamer soon showed how well founded were the suspicions. It was discovered that the name of the vessel had been filed off the bell, and that the numbers on the combings of the main hatch had been mutilated and changed, appearing on superficial examination as 77,942, but on being scraped and kerosened other figures came to view, four of which formed part of the number of the *Ferret*, the fifth being illegible. The number of the *Ferret* was 63,864. On overhauling such ship’s books and papers as upon the first search could be found—some of them being in very unusual places of deposit—it was ascertained that the name of the vessel had been removed, and between the leaves of the log-book was discovered a seaman’s ‘advance-note,’ with the name of the *Ferret* on it,

leaving scarcely a doubt even at this stage that the vessel was the *Ferret* herself. The reputed owner, Smith, and the master decamped, but were afterwards traced by the police and apprehended, the one in a distant township, Longford, and the other in a Melbourne lodging-house, whence (having while drunk got into a row with his landlady) he was taken to the lock-up, and there recognised as the master of the vessel.

The crew shipped at Cardiff have made a full confession, apparently being little further incriminated than in yielding to threats 'that their brains would be blown out' if they communicated to others what they had learnt subsequent to their departure from Cardiff. The account of what was done in the interval between such departure and her arrival here shows a most carefully-devised plan to victimise insurance offices and others on a scale and by means which have never, perhaps, before been employed with similar success in the earlier stages of such an adventure.

The vessel having been seized, on the charge against the master and reputed owner, Smith, of having falsified the ship's register, the case came in due course before the Melbourne Police Office. The crew told all they knew, and the witnesses before the Court became equally explicit. The second steward, the first and second engineers, and a seaman were examined, and their respective stories, condensed, were as follows:—The second steward, John Brown, deposed that on the 22nd of October the chief engineer called on him at the Windsor Hotel, Cardiff, and brought him to the steamer; that he there saw Mr. Walker, the purser, who is now here under the name of Wallace; that he signed articles on that day, and on the 25th the vessel left Cardiff for Milford Haven. Mr. Smith and his wife came on board at Cardiff, and Smith said he was the owner. At some of the ports Smith passed under the

name of Benard, and is now known by the name of Henderson.

They left Milford Haven on the 1st of November for Marseilles (as it was given out), but having passed Gibraltar on the morning of the 11th of November, the ship showing her number, they afterwards turned back in the night without going to Marseilles at all. When passing in first the funnel was white and the ship's boats blue, but during that day the funnel was painted black and the boats white, and thus changed in appearance she passed out of the Gut of Gibraltar at night with her lights screened. When passing out, two boats, several buoys, some empty casks, and several other articles, all with the name *Ferret* on them, were cast overboard, the object evidently being to make it appear that the steamer was lost. On the same night the man figuring under the *aliases* of Benard, Smith, and Henderson called all hands into the cabin, and told them that the passage was one of pleasure and business; that for political reasons he was desirous of concealing his identity from the American authorities; that he was going to trade from Brazil to other ports; that he was the owner, and that after trading some time he would sell her, and reward them handsomely. If they were to divulge anything about the business of the steamer he would blow their brains out. On the 21st of November they arrived at Cape Verd, anchored, and took in water and ballast, a supply of fowls, pigs, and other stores, Henderson giving his bill, payable in London, to the deluded vendors.

After leaving this place, the name of the steamer was changed to the *Benton* by means of paint and carving. She arrived at Santos under the latter name on the 26th of December.

Between that time and the 9th of January of the present year, Henderson was negotiating with agents there to take a cargo of coffee to Marseilles,

making the inhabitants and authorities at Santos believe that the steamer had come from Cape Town, and that she was *en route* to England. By these means Henderson obtained on freight a cargo of coffee, 3,992 bags, consigned to different people at Marseilles. On the 11th of January, 1881, they weighed anchor, but, instead of going to Marseilles to deliver the coffee to the consignees, they went direct to Cape Town, and on the passage to that place the steamer's name was changed from the *Benton* to the *India*, her number and tonnage being also altered. The change in the painting and carving was effected by the carpenters; and the engineers altered the number and tonnage on the iron beam by heating the figures with running lead and relaying a fresh number. They arrived at Cape Town, under the name of the *India*, on the 29th of January, and discharged the coffee by the 3rd of February. It was sold by Henderson (other peoples' coffee, the reader will observe) and realised from £13,000 to £15,000. They were never at Bermuda or La Guayra.

On the 14th of February they left Cape Town with coal and ballast, and arrived at Mauritius on the 1st of March. Having there docked the steamer and scraped and cleaned her, they cleared out 'for Guam.' Your commercial readers know that 'clearing out for Guam' means clearing out for the world at large. They arrived next at Port Albany, in Western Australia, and thence sailed direct to Melbourne. One of the seamen stated that a coloured man named Watkins was the first master, and that the present master (Wright) was chief mate, and the man now called Wallace, acting as purser, was at first known to him by the name of Walker, and that all the present crew, excepting the chief mate and fourth engineer, joined and signed at Cardiff under their own names. The first engineer deposed that he joined the ship at Greenock; that

he had been introduced by Mr. Joseph Walker, of Gracechurch-street, ship-broker, to Mr. Henderson Smith, who, as he (Griffin) was informed, was about to charter a steamer with the view of purchasing her afterwards; that Mr. Smith wanted, it was said, a vessel more of a yacht than of a carrying vessel, as his wife was ill and ordered to seek a change of climate; that he (Griffin) inquired about several steamers, but could not get a suitable one; that about the beginning of 1880 Mr. Walker, the broker, told Griffin 'that they had found a suitable vessel,' and asked Griffin if he would go in her as chief engineer; that he agreed to do so at £15 per month, but if to the Mediterranean or other voyage, the pay to be £25 per month, or current wages; that he was then introduced by letter to the so-called Mr. Smith, and he agreed to go in the *Ferret*; that he was put on pay in London by Smith at once, and was sent to the vessel at Greenock. Confirming what has been above set forth as the evidence of the other witnesses, Griffin stated further that, thinking 'the diversion of the voyage' by the passing through the Straits of Gibraltar and then out again, as above described, 'very strange,' he asked Mr. Smith the reason; that Smith seemed loth at first to tell him, but eventually said—upon Griffin promising not to divulge it—that he (Smith) was a colonel of an American regiment, and had held high official position in the United States, etc., but, having been exiled for political reasons, he was desirous of destroying all traces of his whereabouts. Corroborating the evidence previously given, he (Griffin) further stated that he wished to leave at Mauritius, but Mr. Smith would not allow him to do so; that he was suspicious all was not right, in spite of Smith's assurances to the contrary; and that during the voyage all the crew were called into the cabin and their names changed, in order to prevent the ship being traced.

Both before and since the taking of the depositions above abstracted a rigorous search of the vessel has day by day been conducted under the guidance of the Customs authorities, and further important discoveries have been made which show what elaborate pains have been taken to make a roving swindling expedition a great and profitable all-round success. A private printing-press was discovered, and in a tin box were found duty stamps of all nations, and an account with a printed heading, purporting to be an acknowledgment that a cargo of coffee had been sold by a merchant's firm at La Guayra to Henderson, and a receipt for payment duly stamped. Other papers show that of the proceeds obtained on the fraudulent sale of the coffee by Smith only about £2,300 has been retained by him, and bills to the amount of £8,000, payable in London, at nine months' date, have been sent home. Payment has been stopped by telegram. The original articles of the *Ferret* have been found, and a sale note of the cargo of coffee, showing the amount received and bags damaged, has also turned up. A document has also been found containing a long list of directions in cipher, by means of which communications might be made between those in the vessel and others at home in the course of the cruise. Unfortunately, the day before the seizure by the Government, Henderson, *alias* Smith, accompanied by his wife, succeeded in removing from their cabin whatever they chose, including two heavy iron-bound boxes, which as yet have not been traced. If ever discovered, it is not very probable that any valuables or other articles these boxes contained when removed will ever come into the hands of the police. The man Smith, or Henderson, when arrested at Long-

wood, took it very coolly, as he did also when brought up at the police office. His wife, or the woman who passes as such, at first lay somewhere concealed in the city, but when she found that Henderson had been apprehended, she reappeared, and has since visited him in gaol.

One very curious circumstance connected with this extraordinary business has been productive of much speculation as to the extent and as yet untraced ramifications of the conspiracy. Among the papers seized was a card of a Dr. Bonefin. Now, a swindler of this name—not a common one—was some time back convicted for obtaining goods under false pretences from a number of Melbourne jewellers, and he is now serving a sentence in our Pentridge Gaol. 'Was this man in league,' people ask, 'with Henderson and Co.?' That the *Ferret* people contemplated from the first a visit to this port is seen from the fact that in the cipher code discovered Melbourne figures as No. 51. Hence many persons surmise that Bonefin may have been a sort of advance agent in Melbourne to improve the shining hours until his confederates in the *Ferret* should arrive here.

The crew, who have received no wages, have been allowed temporary refuge in the Sailors' Home, an excellent public institution here. Some of them have become very communicative, and do not hesitate to say among themselves that it was Henderson's ultimate purpose to wind up with a stroke of piracy and seize one of our gold ships on her way to England. This is, most likely, mere invention, as the *Ferret* has no guns as yet discovered, and has neither power nor speed which could enable her to intercept any of the swift steamers to which treasure is always intrusted."