

A Real Case of Buried Treasure.

BY J. HOLT SCHOOLING.

[This article contains an offer to our readers of a share in the Buried Treasure mentioned by Mr. Schooling.]



THE subject of buried treasure has always had a fascination for writers of romance and for their readers. The incomparable Robert Louis Stevenson, Mr. Rider Haggard, and other modern writers of ingenious and vivid tales of adventure have introduced the attractive colour of hidden treasure into their romances; but, in all cases, I believe, the documents shown to the reader, and which contain secret information as to the whereabouts of the treasure, have been evolved from the imagination of the author. Has not Mr. Rider Haggard told us how the chart of the wonderful "King Solomon's Mines," which formed the frontispiece of the book, was manufactured by his sister-in-law?—see *THE STRAND MAGAZINE* for January, 1892, page 14. Indeed, I know of no instance where a romance dealing with buried treasure, from "Monte Christo" to the present day, has contained a real chart, or a real secret cipher, of a real treasure hidden by pirates or by adventurers of past times.

It is by a strange turn of Fortune's wheel that to me—a matter-of-fact writer, and whose "fictional activities" can be counted on the fingers of one hand—has come the opportunity of showing to my readers an actual instance of carefully disguised instructions as to the whereabouts of a buried treasure. Moreover, the circumstances of the case allow me to directly enlist the interest of the public by offering to the person who may succeed in reading the meaning of the hieroglyphics I will show, a substantial share in the treasure to be found. Here are the facts of the case:—

Early this year, I contributed a serial article on methods of cipher-writing, from ancient times up to the present day, to an English magazine that circulates widely in the United States. Each part of this serial article ended with a sentence written in a cipher to which historic interest was attached, and readers were invited to use their ingenuity to solve the various cipher sentences. A good many persons were interested by these old devices, and letters were sent to me

from America and elsewhere—by the way, and concerning the letters that readers of my articles send to me, I should like to take this opportunity to thank the many readers of *THE STRAND MAGAZINE* who have, during the last two or three years, written to me on various subjects. I always welcome such letters, and, in at least one instance, I was able to comply with a request that I would write upon a certain subject. This request, which came from a gentleman in Lancashire, was the origin of one of my most popular papers in *THE STRAND MAGAZINE*.

Pray pardon this digression, which is, however, due to the nature of my present subject—a letter from an unknown reader. Well, one of the letters I received from America, relating to my cipher articles, contained the rather startling offer that is set out in the following letter:—

"SIR,—I have read your interesting articles, 'Secrets in Cipher,' and wish to submit to you the drawings of some undecipherable (to me) 'secrets' which appear upon an old brass box in my possession. I am of the opinion that they will reveal some buried treasure in some of the islands, but have never been able to find the person that could decipher their meaning. If it should turn out that my conjectures are correct, should you make out this hidden secret, I am quite willing to share with you whatever may be found. If you are unwilling to attempt its solution, you would confer a favour by returning this 'enclosure' to the above."

The writer of the letter is a gentleman who holds an official appointment at Washington, U.S.A. I do not now give his name—this information may very well come later on, if any practical result comes from my present offer to readers of *THE STRAND MAGAZINE*. It suffices to say that the Editor has been informed as to the personality of the gentleman who wrote the above letter, and that both he and I entertain no doubt as to the entire good faith of the writer.

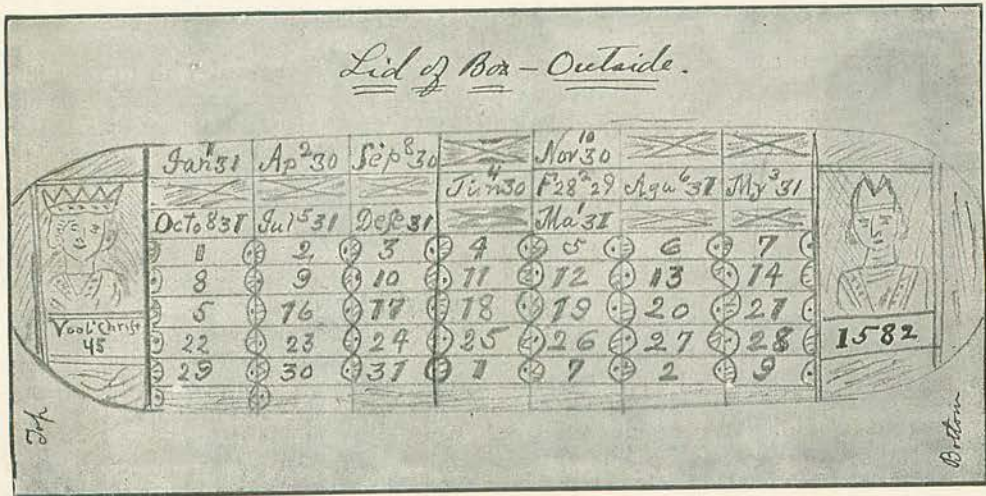
Some persons may be disposed to slight the idea of any Buried Treasure existing nowadays. Of course, one has read of Captain Marryat's pirates, and of Captain Kidd, who carried

on his piracies 200 years ago, and who was executed in England in 1701, and most of us have been properly delighted with the many tales of piratical adventure and of treasure-seekers that always come fresh to minds that are perhaps a little jaded by life in big cities, but which are usually dismissed as being merely cleverly written yarns. But, on second thoughts, it will be evident that no one would take the trouble to make the carefully devised cipher or hieroglyphics that are shown in illustrations Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4, merely to while away time, or without the intention of recording some definite meaning by these secret signs. Beyond all doubt there must have been a lot of treasure, looted or otherwise, piled up by the buccaneers of the last two centuries, whose operations on the "Spanish Main," and whose vicinity to the West Indian Islands, caused them to choose these islands as a convenient harbour of refuge and as a place of safe bestowal for their plunder. Moreover, after I had received the above letter I mentioned the subject I am now talking about to a friend of mine in the Navy—the lieutenant who navigated the

But, after some study of the drawings sent from Washington, I came to the conclusion that "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." My time has a marketable value, and I simply cannot afford to spend an unlimited amount of time upon an uncertainty—valuable as the contingent result may be. Therefore, with the permission of the Editor of THE STRAND MAGAZINE, I decided to enlist the united intellects of the million or so persons who monthly read these pages, with the intention of thereby arriving at a solution of the mystery of these secret ciphers, and, consequently, of finding the whereabouts of the Buried Treasure.

The result of my own study of these very curious drawings does not enable me to give to my readers anything like a definite clue to their hidden meaning. At the best, I can only offer such scanty suggestions or explanations that have occurred to me as being possible hints towards a complete solution of the mystery. I am sorry to say that a fairly close acquaintance with English historical cipher-devices is not of much use to me now.

As regards the diagrams taken from the various parts of the Mysterious Box, the



NO. 1.

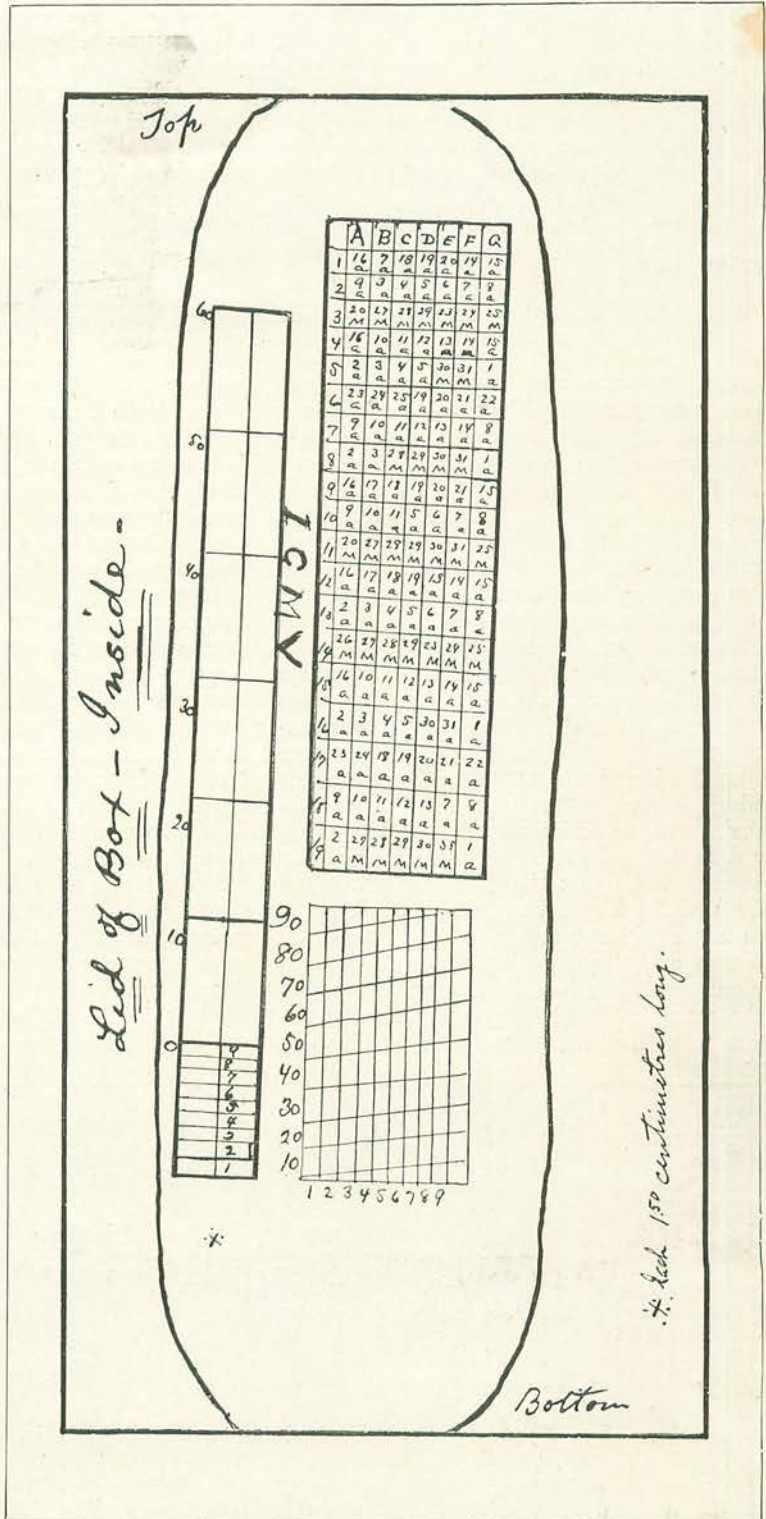
Thrush during her West Indian cruise with Prince George in command. My naval friend said: "Well, there may be a lot of stuff buried somewhere in the West Indies; those fellows had plenty of plunder to get rid of."

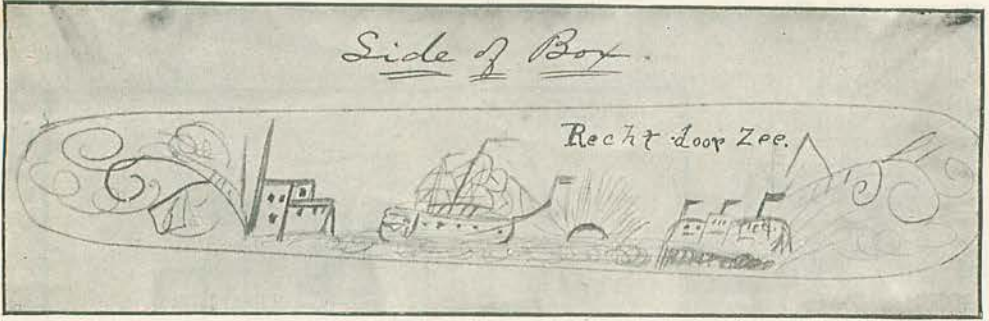
Anyway, I decided not to be "unwilling to attempt" the "solution" of this mystery of the Box and the Buried Treasure.

owner of the box wrote in a later letter than that quoted above: "The drawings which I send you are correct facsimiles of those appearing upon the box—and while they are not so artistic as they might be, will answer the purpose in view: that of solving the mystery, I hope." For our present purpose we are not concerned in the artistic beauty of our illustrations so much as in their

accuracy—and this latter quality is vouched for.

Let us look at No. 1, the cipher on the outside of the lid of the box: the date at the right hand, 1582, which is below the representation of a man in uniform, may possibly relate to the activities of a leading buccaneer. These pirates commenced their depredations on the Spaniards of America soon after the latter had taken possession of that continent and of the West Indies. Their number was much increased by a twelve years' truce between the Spaniards and the Dutch in 1609, when many of the discharged sailors joined the buccaneers. The first levy of ship-money in England, in 1635, was to defray the expense of capturing these pirates: and the chief commanders of the first buccaneers were Montbar, Lolonois, Basco, and Morgan. Another pirate, Van Horn, of Ostend, captured Vera Cruz, in 1603, and they all gained enormous booty. This West Indian buccaneer confederacy was broken up in the year 1697. As, prior to the year 1635, just mentioned, the West Indian pirates had evidently made





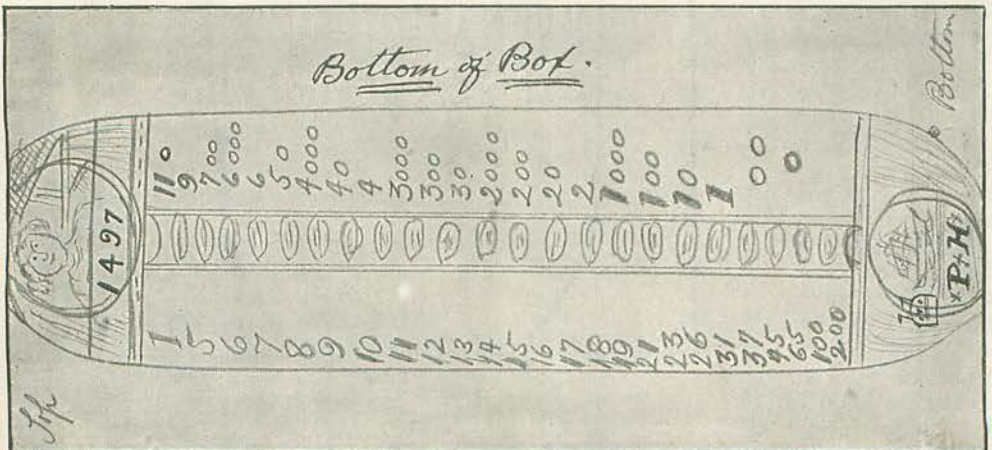
NO. 3.

themselves notorious, it may be that the person represented at the right hand of No. 1 was one of the early buccaneers, who, prior to the truce in 1609 between the Spaniards and the Dutch, had been raiding the Spaniards in America. The head at the left of No. 1 has the words "Vool Christ" and "45" beneath it. I thought "Vool" a Dutch word, but on inquiry I find that it is not, so that the meaning of these words is obscure. The other part of No. 1 seems to be a sort of calendar; the numbers on the five bottom lines run from 1 to 31 (reading from left to right), and "5" at the commencement of the third line from the bottom should evidently be 15. The four numbers which follow the "31" on the bottom line make up 1729, which may refer to A.D. 1729, a date that brings us up to the pirates who succeeded Captain Kidd. The three top lines of No. 1 apparently refer to the months in a year, the number of days in each month, and they contain a numeral for each month, which at first sight appears to denote the numerical order of each month in the year; but this interpretation is considerably

weakened by the fact that several of these numerals do not agree with the order of each month in the year.

Coming to No. 2, the inside of the lid: the lower left-hand part of this diagram looks like a diagonal scale, which is supplemented by the longer scale across the top of No. 2, and there is also the minutely-written table at the right of this facsimile. The whole thing may be some method of plotting, such as is used in surveying or in navigation, to indicate a particular locality, or the means of ascertaining its whereabouts. Perhaps nautical readers may be able to throw some light upon the meaning of No. 2. I do not regard it as a piece of cipher.

We have now to deal with No. 3: the Dutch words, "Recht door Zee," mean "Straight through (the) Sea," or, as a Dutch friend tells me, "Straight forward," i.e., "Right ahead," and there is a bluff-built ship sailing towards the setting sun, i.e., the west. Whether the treasure is buried on an island "Right in the deep sea," whose position is indicated by the diagram in No. 2, and the



NO. 4.

course to which lies "Right ahead," is, of course, merely conjecture.

No. 4 also contains a ship under sail, see the circle at the extreme right. The two horizontal rows of numerals may possibly be a record of various sums of money, and the line of oval drawings that extends horizontally across No. 4 may be meant to represent coins. I have no idea as to the meaning of the female head at the extreme left with "1497" below it.

It is, at the least, probable that diagrams Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4 are related to each other,

and contain, as a whole, the clue to the solution of this mystery. Anyone who may attempt to read this secret of the Box and the Buried Treasure, must be prepared for the possibility of losing some hair in the attempt, even if the trial bring the consolation of an increase in head measurement due to an abnormal exercise of the brain.

Finally, I append in No. 5 a facsimile of my offer to any person who may succeed in bringing to light the Buried Treasure, about which I have now given as full an account as I myself possess.

1st May 1896—

re The Mysterious Box and the Buried Treasure ..

I, John Holt Schooning, hereby promise to give to any reader of the "Strand Magazine" who may succeed in solving the mystery of this Box, and who thereby leads to the discovery of the Buried Treasure in the West Indies to which the Owner of the Box believes the preceding cipher or hieroglyphics to contain the clue, one-half share of whatever I may receive from the discovery of the Treasure: the share promised to me being one-half of the whole, this offer amounts, therefore, to one-quarter of the whole Treasure which may be found—

John Holt Schooning.