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# MISTRESS BRANICAN

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE LOTTERY TICKET," "FIVE WEEKS IN A BALLOON,"  
"ROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS," ETC., ETC.



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# CONTENTS.

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## Part I.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
THE "FRANKLIN" . . . . .	1
CHAPTER II.	
FAMILY MATTERS . . . . .	13
CHAPTER III.	
PROSPECT HOUSE . . . . .	22
CHAPTER IV.	
ON BOARD THE "BOUNDARY". . . . .	32
CHAPTER V.	
THREE MONTHS ELAPSE . . . . .	42
CHAPTER VI.	
THE END OF A SORROWFUL YEAR . . . . .	53
CHAPTER VII.	
VARIOUS MATTERS . . . . .	62
CHAPTER VIII.	
A DIFFICULT POSITION . . . . .	72

## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER X.	
A FEW MORE EXTRACTS . . . . .	292
CHAPTER XI.	
INDICATIONS AND INCIDENTS . . . . .	305
CHAPTER XII.	
THE LAST EFFORTS . . . . .	318
CHAPTER XIII.	
AMONG THE INDAS . . . . .	328
CHAPTER XIV.	
LEN BURKER'S GAME . . . . .	340
CHAPTER XV.	
THE LAST ENCAMPMENT . . . . .	350
CHAPTER XVI.	
THE END . . . . .	358

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
He threw himself amid the waves . . . . .	3
"You have heard his first word" . . . . .	10
A moment afterwards the boat was off . . . . .	11
Len Burker had opened an office . . . . .	19
Frequently would Dolly accompany Captain John . . . . .	25
He clapped his little hands . . . . .	28
And she stood there motionless . . . . .	28
A proof that she brought no bad news . . . . .	29
And then the two vessels parted . . . . .	37
She would have thrown herself overboard . . . . .	41
"I approve of your offer" . . . . .	44
No one could have been more assiduous than Jane . . . . .	46
"There ! There !" repeated Dolly . . . . .	48
The report soon spread . . . . .	51
He spoke to her over the fence . . . . .	57
Then she looked out into the bay . . . . .	71
She poured out her soul in prayer . . . . .	85
She looked to the right . . . . .	86
Dolly followed it with her eyes . . . . .	87
Mindanao . . . . .	105
Formidable seas boarded her . . . . .	106
Singapore . . . . .	109
The charts were spread upon the table . . . . .	114
They shook their spears . . . . .	130
"That is curious," said Zach Fren . . . . .	133
Reef on the port bow . . . . .	138
The launch went ashore . . . . .	141
"And what makes you think that, Captain?" . . . . .	143
"They had scarcely saved anything from the ship" . . . . .	147
The ground was encumbered . . . . .	150
The "Franklin's" bell . . . . .	151
Return of the "Dolly Hope" . . . . .	153
Dolly at Wat House . . . . .	160
The steamer entered Port Jackson . . . . .	164
It was Harry Felton . . . . .	165

	PAGE
"Living?" she asked . . . . .	169
Unconscious on the banks of the Parru . . . . .	176
"Is Harry Felton dead?" . . . . .	178
Harry Felton was buried . . . . .	178
The boy kept him back . . . . .	183
The passengers showed her extreme deference . . . . .	186
In the first rays of the morning . . . . .	188
The aspect of the coast is gloomy . . . . .	190
"Good! oh, very good!" . . . . .	196
"I have often seen you" . . . . .	200
Tom Marix . . . . .	205
They welcomed her with much sympathy . . . . .	220
They travelled on horseback . . . . .	222
With a little bundle under his arm . . . . .	224
Through the bush . . . . .	227
It was not difficult to find fords . . . . .	231
There leapt the kangaroo . . . . .	236
Meeting with some of the bears . . . . .	237
The water was already low . . . . .	238
Waldek Hill . . . . .	239
Shearing in full swing . . . . .	240
There was no disputing with such a man . . . . .	248
The aspect of the country gradually changed . . . . .	253
Plains extended up to the horizon . . . . .	260
The sheep could be counted by hundreds of thousands . . . . .	264
He put spurs to his horse . . . . .	277
"On the banks of the Fitzroy River" . . . . .	278
When the dear boy comes near our kibitka . . . . .	281
It is a sort of boa . . . . .	283
"It is not the camel you should whip" . . . . .	288
Waterloo Spring . . . . .	291
We should have preferred drinking water . . . . .	297
The caravan journeys on . . . . .	300
What terrible sufferings we have had . . . . .	302
Two blacks among the sand hills . . . . .	308
"And we will pursue them!" . . . . .	310
A sudden darkness enveloped the plain . . . . .	316
They could neither see nor hear . . . . .	317
A camp of the Indas . . . . .	328
Attacked by the natives . . . . .	329
By means of a reed or flexible rattan . . . . .	331
The two prisoners were watched so closely . . . . .	335
He required a higher price . . . . .	342
The Indas were there no longer . . . . .	347
The blacks were dragging them towards the river . . . . .	353
"Godfrey is your child!" . . . . .	357

## MISTRESS BRANICAN.

### Part I.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE "FRANKLIN."

THERE are two chances of never again seeing the friends we part with when starting on a long voyage; those we leave may not be here on our return, and those who go may never come back. But little heed of these eventualities was taken by the sailors who were preparing for departure on board the *Franklin* in the morning of the 15th of March, 1875.

On that day the *Franklin*, Captain John Branican, was about to quit the port of San Diego, in California, on a voyage across the Northern Pacific.

A fine vessel of nine hundred tons was this *Franklin*—a barquentine fully canvased with gaff sails, jibs and stay-sails, and with topmast and top-gallant-mast on the fore.

Long and narrow in the bow, finely modelled in the quick-works, and with a good clean run, her masts gently raking and strictly parallel, her standing rigging of galvanized wire as stiff as iron bars, she was of the most modern type of those elegant clippers which the North Americans find so well adapted for their ocean trade and which compete in speed with the best steamers of their mercantile marine.

The *Franklin* was so well built and efficiently commanded that not a man of her crew would have shipped on another vessel—even with the assurance of obtaining higher pay. All were preparing to start content in their double confidence in a good ship and a good captain.

The *Franklin* was to make her first voyage on behalf of William H. Andrew and Co. of San Diego. She was bound to Calcutta by way of Singapore with a cargo of American goods to return with Indian products to one of the Californian ports.

Captain John Branican was a young man of nine and twenty, with an attractive but resolute face, his features telling of unusual energy; he possessed in the highest degree that moral courage so superior to physical courage—that “two o’clock in the morning courage,” as Napoleon called it—that is to say, the kind that faces the unexpected and is ready for action at any moment. His head had more character than beauty, with his rough hair, his eyes animated with a keen, frank look which flashed like a dart from their black pupils. It would be difficult to imagine a man of his age more robust in body or constitution. That was clear enough in the vigour of his handshakings which indicated the ardour of his blood and the strength of his muscles. But what we have particularly to note is that the spirit contained in this body of iron was a good and noble spirit, ready to sacrifice its life for its kind. John Branican was of the character of those rescuers whose coolness enables them to perform heroic acts without hesitation. He had given proof of this early in life. One day, among the broken ice of the bay on a capsized boat, he had saved children like himself; and later on he had not belied the instincts of self-sacrifice which had marked his youth.

A few years after John Branican had lost his father and his mother, he had married Dolly Starter, an orphan, belonging to one of the best families of San Diego. The girl’s dowry was a modest one, and suitable for the position, equally modest, of the young sailor, then a mate

on a merchant vessel. But there was reason to think that Dolly would one day be the heiress of a very rich uncle, Edward Starter, who lived a farmer’s life in the wildest and most out-of-the-way part of Tennessee. Meanwhile it would have to be enough to live on for two, or even for three, for little Walter—Wat, by abbreviation—came into the world in the first year of the marriage. Thus John Branican—and his wife understood it—could not dream of abandoning his profession as a sailor. In the future he would see what he could do, when the fortune came by inheritance, or by his enriching himself in Andrews’ service.

Besides this, the young sailor’s promotion had been unusually rapid. He had advanced quickly, and he had advanced straight. He was a captain at an age when most of his colleagues were only mates. If his abilities justified this promotion, his advance was explained by certain circumstances which had properly drawn attention to him.

In fact, John Branican was popular at San Diego, and at the different ports on the Californian coast. His acts of self-sacrifice had been noted with applause, not only by sailors, but by the merchants and shipowners of the Union.

A few years before, a Peruvian schooner, the *Sonora*, had come ashore at the entrance to Coronado Beach, and the crew would have been lost if communication had not been established between the ship and the shore. But to take a rope out through the breakers was to risk one’s life a hundred times. John Branican did not hesitate. He threw himself amid the waves which came rolling in with extreme violence on to the reefs and then came beating on to the beach in a terrible surf. In sight of the death which he would have faced without thinking of the danger, the people would have held him back. He resisted; he hurled himself towards the schooner; he succeeded in reaching her, and, thanks to his bravery, the *Sonora’s* crew were saved.