



Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead.

By John Lamb

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36. Jules Verne Moves Aside.



Jules Verne in 1880

UBI FIDES IBI LUX ET ROBUR



Part 36. Jules Verne Moves Aside.

A decade after the 1869 publication of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, Jules Verne must have realized that despite all the clues given, his readership was simply not going to make the link between the *CSS Alabama* and Captain Nemo's *Nautilus*.

As time wore on, and the *Alabama* and the *Pirate Semmes* faded into historical obscurity, the chances of this link being discovered would have become less and less. Verne knew this, but he would not compromise on his standards by giving even simpler 'clues'.

There was only one option, he would move aside! Yes, he might mention Birkenhead in the odd novel in the future and the town's stage sets could be dusted off once again, but no that was about it – he had finished with Birkenhead!

As a man of honour, though, Jules Verne would find his own replacement.

What happens next will take us directly to our fifth novel – and our fifth novel will not be written by Jules Verne but by someone who can now only be described as Verne's protégé.

In order to explain this, it is best to reconstruct a speech that Verne may have given to those he trusted the most.

The date is given as the middle of August, 1881, a time when the fifth book was already being serialised in the children's magazine *Young Folks*.

Where exactly this speech took place and to whom it was given to, we may never know, but what we do know is what happened next.

A Reconstruction of a Confidential Talk that Jules Verne Must Have Given in 1880-81.

Paris 17th August 1881.

Mesdames et Messieurs, and members of 'La Committee' I thank you for inviting me along to talk to you today.

I will always be grateful to the town of Birkenhead, for it has given me Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, The Mysterious Island, Journey to the Centre of the Earth and of course Around the World in Eighty Days.

However, regarding the Birkenhead Alabama and the Birkenhead Nautilus, it has become quite clear to me, that despite the most obvious of clues given that we face two insurmountable obstacles in the human condition, the first is that my readership simply cannot comprehend that a sailing ship may be represented by a submarine, and the second is that my readership cannot comprehend that an island may be represented by a peninsula.

In this aspect I have been too successful, and I will not make my clues any easier on a whim of my own impatience. I have thrown out thousands of 'floating containers' – people simply have to pick them up ... and read the contents, I am not going to place those containers in their hand!

I must tell you now that I intend to stand down writing about the town of Birkenhead for the foreseeable future. I have covered almost every aspect of its physical and human geography and I have now recorded in literature at least, the repentance of Admiral Semmes.

I remain grateful to Admiral Semmes for lending me his memoirs and helping me to create Captain Nemo and the Nautilus... but my job is now done!

It is now time for those younger than myself to take my place, and I will come to this shortly.

A few months ago, I had the good fortune to meet with young Theodore Roosevelt in Paris and he is growing into the fine young man that Herbert promised to be in the Mysterious Island. He will undoubtedly contribute greatly to the unified American people, and I believe we should do all that we can to help him.

Sadly, young Roosevelt's father has passed away since I last spoke to you. Theodore Roosevelt Senior, by common knowledge was the finest man in New York, a friend of both Mr and Mrs Lincoln.

His courage in the last conflict, while proving a house can stand when divided, is a lesson to us all. In tribute Theodore Roosevelt Senior shall rise again in our new novel, but as we look to the future, it will be the young Roosevelt who will play the lead.

I shall now explain to you how I came to meet the new author who will be my successor.

Mr Fleeming Jenkin is well known to you all for his work on the 1857 Atlantic cable at R S Newall in Birkenhead, it was here that he first came to the attention of Sir George Thompson in Glasgow – they are now of course very successful business partners.*

Mr Jenkin himself was a regular visitor to a good friend of ours now sadly passed, the late Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell and it is there he honed his own debating and literary skills in the company of Mrs Gaskell's daughters.

As a professor in Edinburgh, Fleeming Jenkin has come across a young physics student, he is woeful at his studies and prone to missing lectures. Nevertheless, Fleeming has taken a liking to this young man, who has a wonderful flair for amateur dramatics and a very vivid imagination.

The student is a regular visitor to Paris so I have taken him under my wing to write his new novel.

*I must say his writing possesses extraordinary freshness of style and enormous power.***

He realizes that I have almost 'worn out' our Birkenhead stage sets and so he has tried pastures new in Wallasey. I have walked the field with this young man and he learns quickly. He also knows the rules, he must start in Wallasey, and the plot must remain in Wallasey under another guise as he recycles his stage sets.

He can of course venture to other places around Birkenhead and the Wirral as he so wishes.

These are the 'party games of improvisation' that have stood me in such good stead for the last 15 years.

Now that we have completed the redemption in literature of Raphael Semmes, there remains but one issue to be dealt with, and that is the subject of the Alabama's 'missing' gold.

I refer you to the public statement by Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of State William Seward some 15 years ago.

"Moreover, we are informed from Paris, that the Deerhound, before going out, received from Semmes, and that she subsequently conveyed away to England, a deposit of money, and other valuables, of which Semmes, in his long piratical career, had despoiled numerous American merchantmen."

Not only has the Alabama been forgotten, but so has its gold!

I have suggested to our young author that he should make finding this gold a priority, together of course with the obligatory lampooning of Captain Semmes. In fact, Semmes will play five characters in this novel, one more than he played in my Mysterious Island. This author fellow is nothing but competitive!

All I can say to everyone is thank you and I have had the honour of being your obedient servant.

M. Jules Verne.

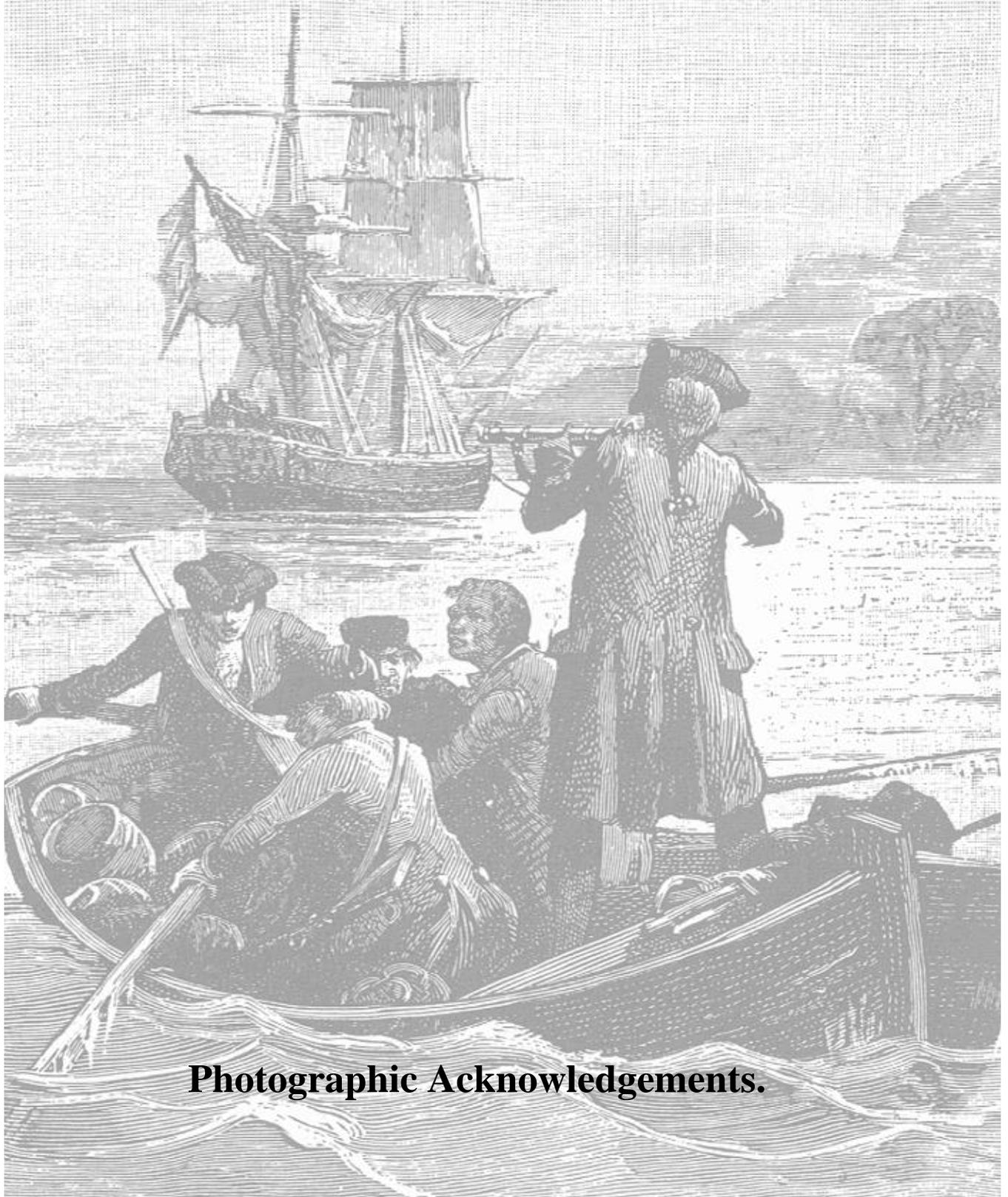
* Now known as Lord Kelvin.

** Verne did actually say this about the author and our fifth novel in an interview in the Strand magazine dated February 1895.

Next in Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead.

37. The Fifth Novel Revealed.

36. Jules Verne Moves Aside.



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