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# BLAKE OF THE RATTLESNAKE



A STORY OF THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY  
IN 1850

FRED. T. JANE  
AUTHOR-ILLUSTRATOR

THE NEW YORK PUBLISHING CO. LTD.

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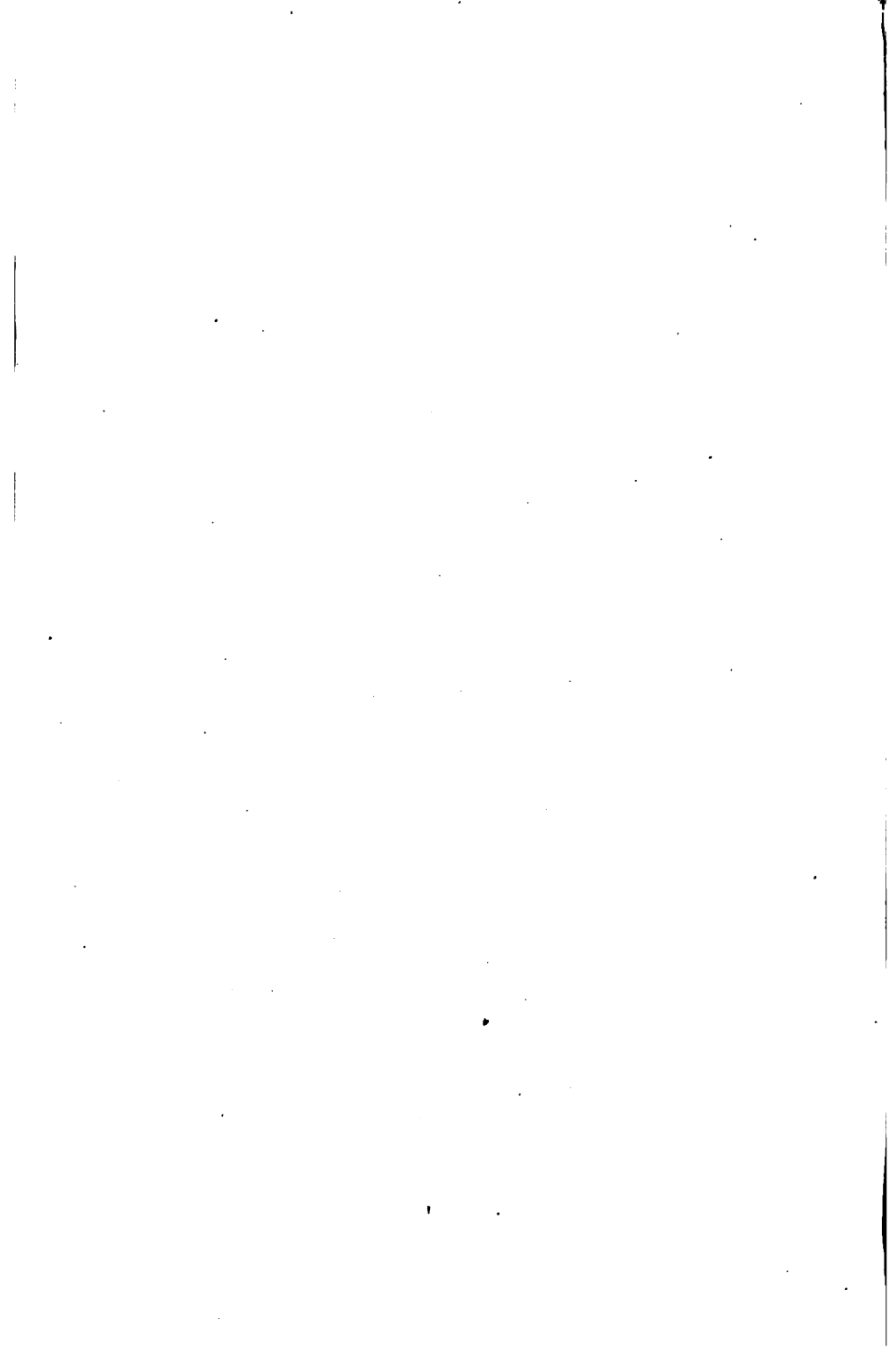
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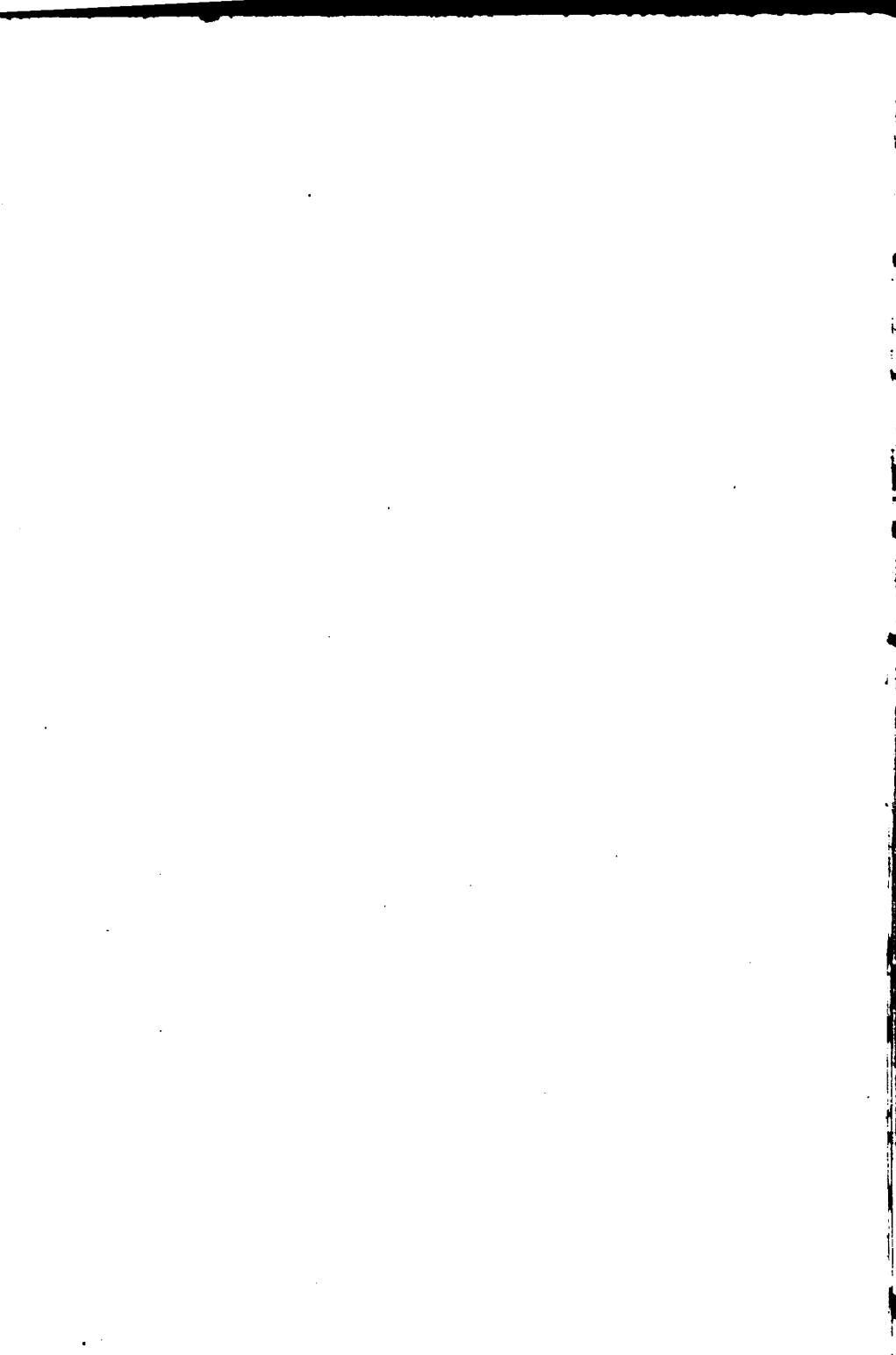
BLAKE  
OF THE  
"RATTLESNAKE"

OR

*THE MAN WHO SAVED ENGLAND*

"Between England and ruin there is but one bulwark,  
the British Navy. Our fleet destroyed, no power on  
earth can save us. Other defence have we none."

MORRISON AND GIBB, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH







THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT HAD COME !

See page 251.

(*Frontispiece.*)

BLIND  
RATTLE

THE MAN WITH THE RATTLE

A STORY OF GOREAU

BY H. G. WELLS

WITH  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
J. H. B. COOPER

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BLAKE  
OF THE  
"RATTLESNAKE"

OR

*THE MAN WHO SAVED ENGLAND*

A STORY OF TORPEDO WARFARE IN 189-

By FRED T. JANE

AUTHOR OF

"FROM QUEENSTOWN TO SHEERNESS IN TORPEDO BOAT NO. 65"

"LIFE ON BOARD A TORPEDO CATCHER"

ETC. ETC.

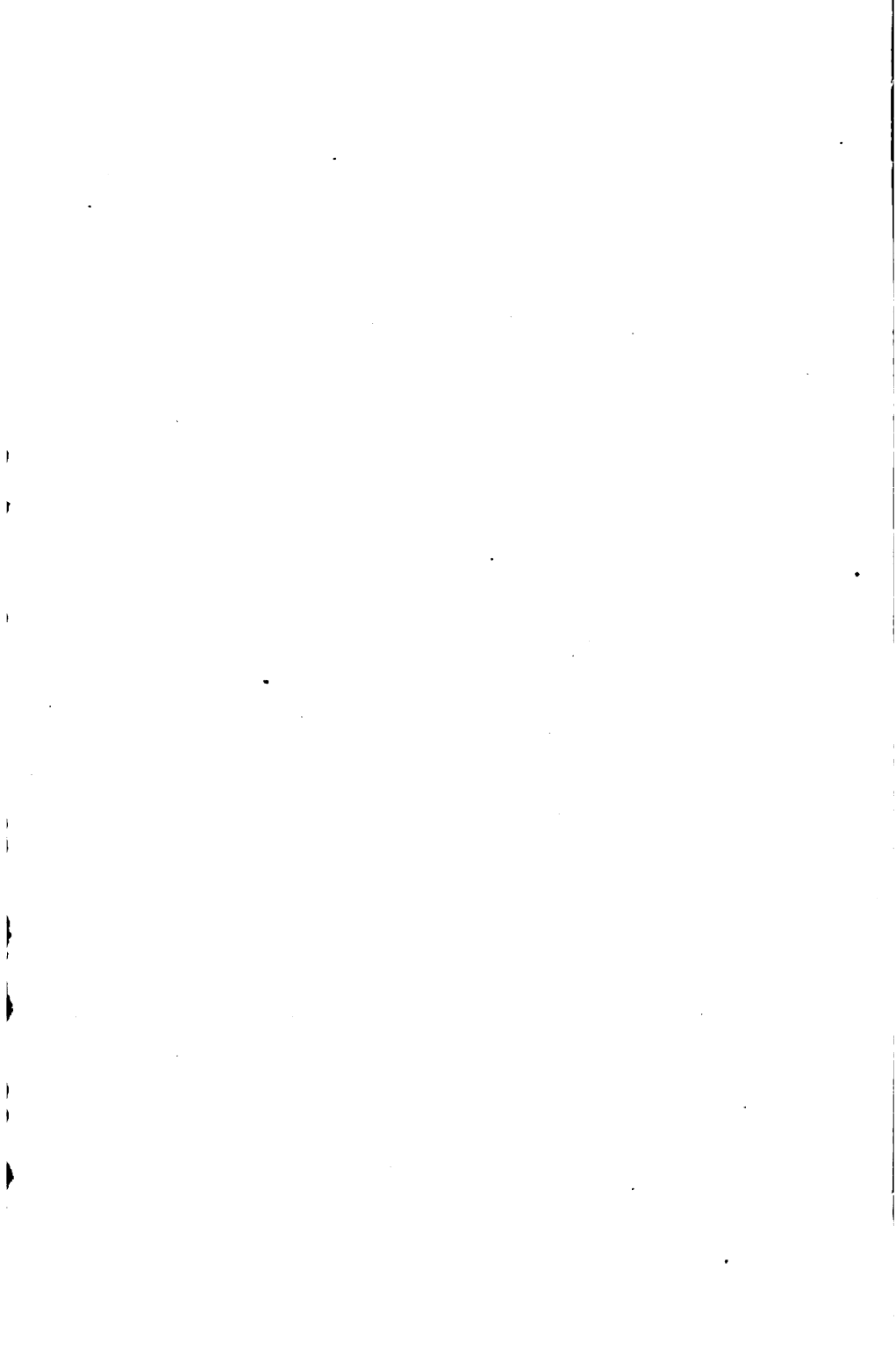
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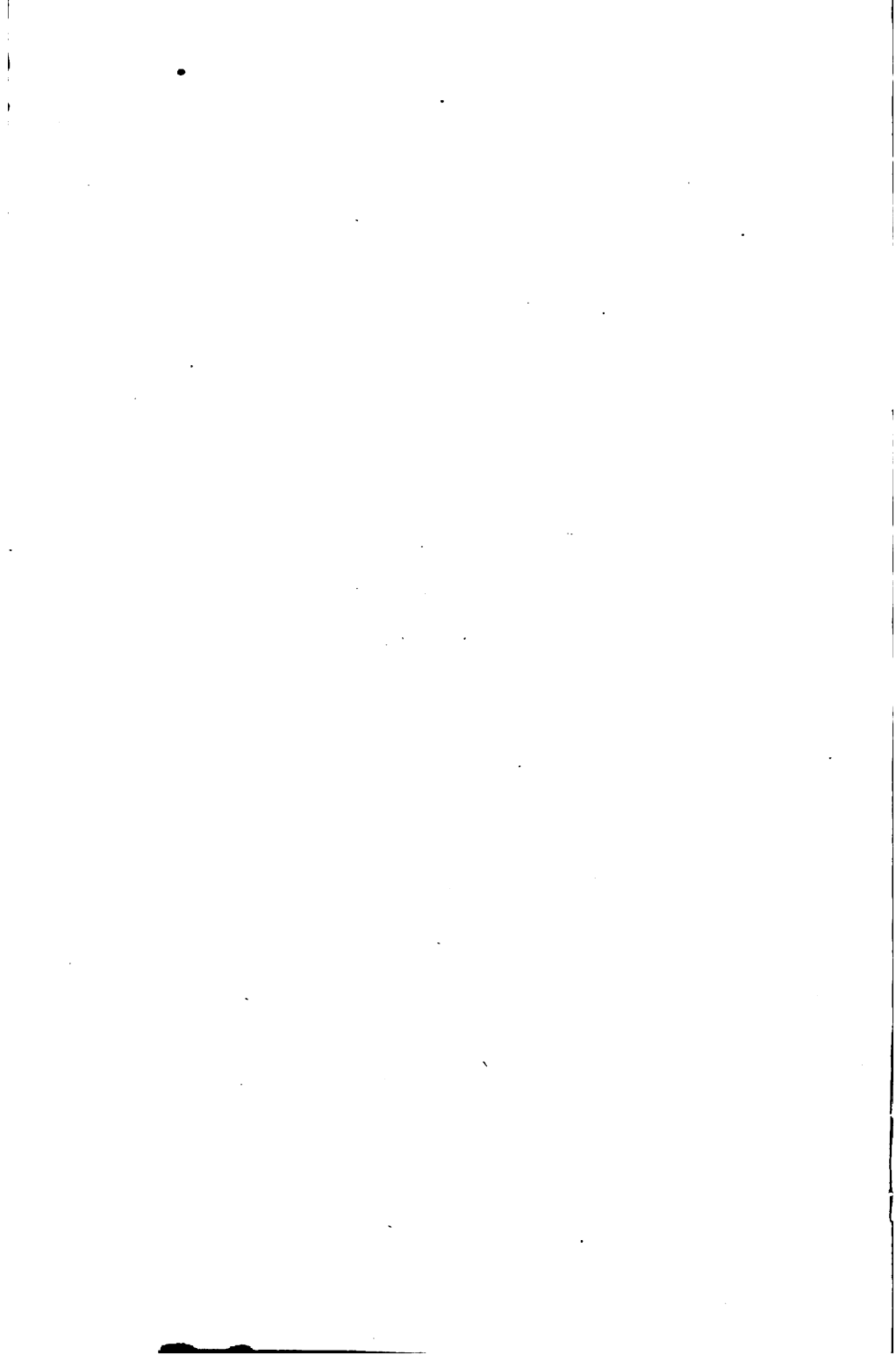
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TO  
ALL OLD SHIPMATES IN CATCHERS AND  
TORPEDO-BOATS  
AND IN PARTICULAR  
TO  
ARTHUR BARRY, LIEUTENANT, R.N.  
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK



V253  
J3

## PREFACE

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I HAVE not sought or attempted in this story to settle any vexed questions of theories or tactics; such matters are no concern of mine. I have tried instead to work into story-form some of the romance that clings thick around the torpedo service, to set forth some of the poetry latent in torpedo craft. Any other aims I may have had in view are, I trust, sufficiently obvious in the text to need no mention here.

It has been my good fortune to have had a good share of experience in torpedo craft during the naval manœuvres of the last few years, and on incidents thus participated in I have based this tale. Manœuvres, of course, are not war; but, in the torpedo service at any rate, they are carried out with as much approximation to the actual thing as can be.



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managed. For the rest, I have sought to work out my results from what is held by those who, in the event of war, will have to stake their lives upon their beliefs. I have endeavoured, as far as may be, to avoid anything savouring of the improbable, while giving as much allowance as possible to that ever-present element in torpedo work—Luck. This, ever a feature in warfare, increases as the years go on, and as scientific devices multiply, however non-existent it may theoretically be.

I am indebted to very many naval friends for suggestions that have materially aided the development of this tale; so many, indeed, that space will not permit of individual recognition. The trouble they have taken will, I trust, not be thrown away, and I venture to hope that this attempt to depict modern warfare from the Service point of view will convince the present and the rising generation that scientific advance has not yet eliminated the romance that, let peace-faddists say what they will, clings, and ever has clung around war; and that man—the *vir*—is not yet supplanted by man—the *homo*.

I dimly feel that I owe my readers some

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sort of apology for not having prated on the need of Admiralty reform. It is the fashion to abuse that body, to imply that they are a set of muddle-headed boobies, and all the rest of it. In a sense they may be, in that they calmly submit to all this interference from self-appointed critics. Personally, I feel that were the energy thus wasted expended in agitation to give the Admiralty powers to act unfettered by the "six hundred talking asses" at Westminster; in transferring to the Navy some of the money frittered away on our, comparatively speaking, useless army; in attempts to nullify the invertebrate knaves of "Little Englanders" who, whenever Imperial questions come up for discussion, do their evil best to prove that modern England can and does produce specimens of humanity that are a disgrace to the name of Briton;—were it thus expended, we should be in far less danger of going to leeward. However, the chiefest glory of a democracy, under such as we now live, is the privilege of every fool to teach other men their business. Two thousand years and more ago, the Athenian empire found this sort of thing disastrous; the day may come when we shall learn so too.

I would say one final word to those who object to these "future war yarns," on the grounds that they are likely to set other nations, at present friendly to us, by the ears. Foreign writers are frequently turning out similar stories, describing the utter destruction of the British Navy by their own; yet I never heard of any of us bearing them ill-will for it. May our Warfare of the Future long be confined to the pages of books; as, indeed, it will be, so long as foreign nations know that we are ready to tackle the lot of them if need be.

CHELSEA, 1895.

 **CONTENTS**   


	<b>CHAPTER I</b>	
<b>PAGE</b>		
<b>15</b>	. . . . .	<b>TORPEDED AT SEA</b>
	<b>CHAPTER II</b>	
<b>37</b>	. . . . .	<b>EARLY VICTORIES</b>
	<b>CHAPTER III</b>	
<b>64</b>	. . . . .	<b>THE RESCUE OF A SWEETHEART</b>
	<b>CHAPTER IV</b>	
<b>87</b>	. . . . .	<b>THE PRESS-GANG</b>
	<b>CHAPTER V</b>	
<b>97</b>	. . . . .	<b>A TORPEDO-BOAT ATTACK</b>
	<b>CHAPTER VI</b>	
<b>113</b>	. . . . .	<b>THE CRONSTADT DISASTER</b>
	<b>CHAPTER VII</b>	
<b>126</b>	. . . . .	<b>ON CONVOY DUTY</b>

---

		CHAPTER VIII
PAGE		
146	. . . . .	ENGLAND'S ARGOSPOTOMI
		CHAPTER IX
157	. . . . .	HOW WE ESCAPED
		CHAPTER X
172	. . . . .	OUR BASE OF OPERATIONS
		CHAPTER XI
181	. . . . .	A PICNIC, AND WHAT CAME OF IT
		CHAPTER XII
195	. . . . .	MORE TROUBLES
		CHAPTER XIII
210	. . . . .	BLAKE'S REVOLT
		CHAPTER XIV
229	. . . . .	THE DAY BEFORE
		CHAPTER XV
240	. . . . .	WOMAN'S LOVE AND MAN'S DUTY
		CHAPTER XVI
249		THE SAVING OF ENGLAND: "TORPEDO TRIUMPHANS"



# ILLUSTRATIONS



PAGE	
	<i>Frontispiece</i> . . . THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT HAD COME! (See p. 251)
18	. . . . . H.M.S. "NELSON"
27	EVERY GUN ON OUR STARBOARD SIDE WAS DISCHARGED
28	. . . A THUNDERSTORM SEEMED TO BURST ABOUT US
30	. . . PLAN OF THE ATTACK ON H.M.S. "NELSON"
38	. . . . . H.M.S. "RATTLESNAKE"
46	. . . . . PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF CHERBOURG
47	. . . THE PRESTIGE OF TRAFALGAR DID ITS WORK
65	. . . . . DECK PLAN OF H.M.S. "RATTLESNAKE"
79	SLOWLY THE GREAT SHIP WENT DOWN, HER STRUGGLING BURDEN CROWDING HER HULL, BESEECHING FOR AID THAT CAME NOT!
82	PLAN OF THE FIGHT BETWEEN THE "RATTLESNAKE" AND THE "DAVOUT"
98	. . . . . TORPEDO-BOAT NO. 65
105	. . . THE TORPEDO-BOAT AFFAIR IN THE CHANNEL
106	. . . SACRIFICED TO A SIGNALMAN'S BLUNDER
108	I FOUND HIM ALL OF A HEAP ON THE DECK, THOUGH STILL GRASPING THE STEERING-WHEEL

PAGE	
121	A CRUISER HAD TOWED US OUT OF ACTION, FOR THE SHIP, BEING PRETTY WELL BLOWN INSIDE OUT, COULD NEITHER STEER NOR STEAM
122	. . . . . H.M.S. "NORTHAMPTON"
124	. . . . . THE NEW "RATTLESNAKE"
142	THE TORPEDO HIT HER IN THE BOW AS SHE CIRCLED, AND HER GAME WAS UP
147	. . . . . THIS WAS THE BRITISH FLEET!
149	. . . . . SKETCH-PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF ABŌ
150	. . . . . "THEY NEVER REACHED THE RUSSIANS"
159	. . . . . "YOU ENGLISH ARE NO LONGER ZE SEA-BULLY"
192	. . . . . "WOULD YOU MURDER US?" CRIED GREEN
199	. . . . . BOUVERIE'S PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF LAMLASH
204	THE TWO WARSHIPS SEEMED WELL ON THEIR WAY TO THE MUTAL DESTRUCTION SPOKEN OF BY BLAKE
256	EVEN AS I CALLED SHE PULLED THE STRING, AND WITH A HISS AND A ROAR THE ROCKET FLEW BLAZING INTO THE SKY . . . BETRAYING OUR POSITION TO THE ENEMY!
265	THEN CAME THE ROAR OF A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION, AND I KNEW THAT BLAKE AND THE "RATTLE- SNAKE" WERE NO MORE!



# BLAKE OF THE "RATTLESNAKE"

## CHAPTER I

### TORPEDOED AT SEA

**W**ELL, I'll lay anybody three to one that we don't see any French torpedo-boats between here and Plymouth!"

"No, thanks, purser, I'm not keen enough on winning that bet to take you on; added to which, if we do come across any, there'll be no one left for you to hand the dollars over to."

"By Jove, Grey, you are a croaker, and no mistake," laughed the commander. "It's easy to see that you've been associating too much with the *Vernon* fellows, and getting inoculated with the cult of the omnipotent torpedo."



"Well, anyway, sir, I'd sooner be going into action against a big fleet of battleships; and that's no great catch in an old tub like this, is it?"

"None of us would ever come out of it, I guess, except maybe the doctors and the fellows below. However, I'm after a sherry and bitters at present; who's in for a swindle?"

Next moment the three of them were deep in the mysteries of "poker-dice," regardless of war and its inevitable consequences; the future would bring quite enough worry of that sort; there was no need to fill the present with forebodings of evil.

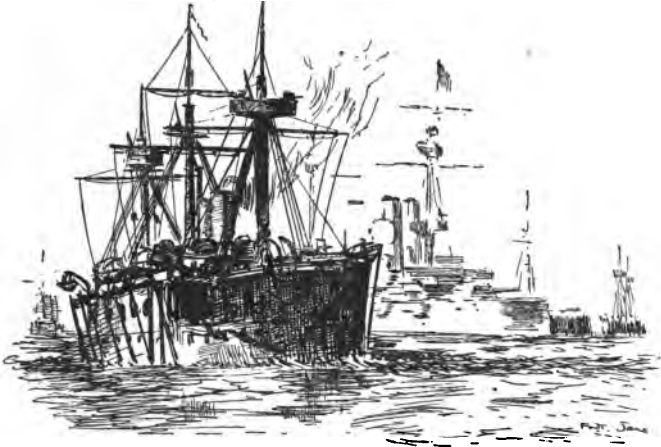
I give this bit of conversation because it has run in my head ever since, in the way that trivial things like this will run. Whenever my thoughts go back to those stirring days, the first picture in my mind is ever this unimportant little incident. I can still see them bending over the white tablecloth, still hear the loud laugh of the commander, as the paymaster, throwing with a peculiar turn of the hand that he swore by, failed to secure more than a single pair against the full hands of the others. Alas that it should

be but a memory of the dead ; a memory of men going calmly to their dooms, knowing as they went that no other fate could be in store for them. For this was the day on which England went to war.

The war, as you doubtless remember, broke out quite suddenly and unexpectedly just after the manœuvres in 189-. As to how it came about that we were embroiled with France and Russia I can't exactly say — politics are not in a sailor's line. All I know about it is that when our fleet put into Milford Haven at the end of the manœuvres, instead of our being inspected and sent home to pay off, in the usual fashion, we were kept hanging about doing nothing in Dale Harbour, and all leave was stopped. This stoppage of leave troubled us a good deal more than the war scare, which nobody expected to come to anything ; war scares were common in those days. So we stuck on board, cursing and grumbling at our ill luck, till one fateful afternoon came telegrams saying that war was declared. The spell of peace was ended at last, the long-expected thundercloud had burst in all its violence.

All our ships were complete with coal, but

there were a thousand and one other things to be seen to—letters to be written to those who might never hear from us again, fresh provisions to be got in, things to be made snug for sea, and innumerable little odds and ends ; it was a busy day for everybody.



H.M.S. "NELSON."

I was at this period an acting sub in the *Nelson* ; a rather useless old packet, and the "lame duck" of our squadron. Having done a *Vernon* course and got a "one," I should by rights have been in a torpedo-boat, but the *Nelson's* skipper—an old shipmate of

mine—had offered me a berth as signal matey in her, and a jolly comfortable billet it was ; far preferable to roughing things in a torpedo-boat, living on sardines and potted meat.

The bugle went for dinner, and we all trooped into the wardroom as usual—we had no gunroom mess in the *Nelson*, she being a mobilised ship. The meal was a hurried one, but that was more because we were to put to sea at one bell, than because we were so soon to face the unknown with its terrible possibilities. Conversation was naturally all about the war and its prospects, and the probability of our being turned over to some more efficient ship when we got to Portsmouth.

“It’s quite on the cards,” said the commander, “that the dunderheads at the A. will look up this ship, and, seeing her down as a first class armoured cruiser, send her off to chase some 20 - knot Frenchman.” And no one was bold enough to deny his words ; the Admiralty could never get it out of their heads in those days that a ship grows old as quickly as a racehorse does.

“I hope to God this war business gets peaceably settled before we have a fight,”

said Lieutenant Blake, "for there's never a fellow will come out of it alive. It's just do your duty and die."

Some of the mess were inclined to rally the pessimistic Blake on his chicken-heartedness, but our old No. 1 called across the table to him—

"All right, my boy, you're down for a V.C.; all you chaps who croak in that fashion go and cut a dash later on."

"Well, I hope I'll do it better than I did in No. 92," replied Blake, with a laugh. No. 92 torpedo-boat, commanded by Blake, had badly damaged herself a few days before, through colliding with another boat off the Haven; and while she was lying useless in harbour, Blake had been temporarily sent to us, we being a lieutenant short in the *Nelson*.

There was a good laugh at Blake's joke against himself, and after that we got merrier; indeed, by the time we'd drunk "the Queen," we were all as chirpy as the commander was before dinner. There's nothing like a good meal for pulling a fellow together.

There is so much about Blake in this story, that some sort of description of him should be forthcoming, though I'm a bad hand at

---

that kind of thing. Clean shaved, save for the slight Service whiskers he affected, of medium height and rather gaunt, there was little in his outward appearance to distinguish him from other non-bearded officers of his rank. The Sea Service sets its indelible mark upon all its votaries; and whatever the original features of the boy, when he grows to manhood, his arduous duties mould his expression into one universal type. Responsibility stamps its seal on the mouth and eyes of every naval officer, making it patent to the world that he is a man of action. For the rest, Blake, like all executive officers, was devoted heart and soul to his profession; indeed, he went so far, that it even became a proverb in the wardroom. Looking on politicians of both parties as knaves alike, contemptuous of civilian control of the fleet, callous to all amusements, and interested in nothing save in so far as it touched his profession, he was a man marked out to rise and succeed from the first. "Blake," said an old admiral of his, "is the sort of fellow to attack a fleet of battleships with a second class cruiser, and to manage to come out top;" and this, whatever doleful prognostications he

might make, was about the tally we all took of him.

When I got on deck again, it was to find that the catchers and cruisers had already gone out of harbour; and before long we followed suit. I suppose our admiral did not care to risk a torpedo attack in a place like Dale Harbour, where there were no boom defences, and which the manœuvres had shown to be all too open to torpedo attack; so intended to assume the vigorous offensive.

Our fleet consisted of the battleships *Majestic*, *Royal Sovereign*, *Thunderer*, *Resolution*; our ship *Nelson*, which was classed as an armour-belted cruiser; the belted cruisers *Immortalité* and *Narcissus*; first and second class cruisers *Blenheim*, *Iphigenia*, *Tribune*, *Latona*, and the third class cruiser *Bellona*. We had besides some four or five catchers, whose names I cannot now remember, but one of them was the *Halcyon*, which had only returned that morning from a scouting expedition. She had lain quite near us on her return, and we had speculated much on some holes in her bow that looked uncommonly like shot-holes. Her skipper had been a very long time on board the flag-

ship, whither he had been called after having begun a semaphore about the enemy's torpedo-boats. I did not hear till later what had actually happened; indeed I am never quite clear about it, since the matter was kept as quiet as possible; but as far as I can gather, the *Halcyon*, scouting off the Haven the night before, had almost run into a couple of French torpedo-boats which did not notice her at first, the night being very thick. These boats, which were slowly steaming towards Milford with tubes trained abeam, turned tail and made away at full speed as soon as ever they sighted the *Halcyon*; but there being a tidy bit of sea on, the catcher was easily able to overhaul them. No two accounts agree as to what happened next, save that the boats went down with all on board; and as the *Halcyon* was lost herself the very next night, it will never be known exactly how it all came about; but it seems probable that the *Halcyon's* skipper destroyed the boats, in order to put it out of their power to do any mischief they might have been intent on doing so soon as war should be declared. I had often heard this sort of action advocated as an absolutely necessary course by torpedo



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men,—who, knew pretty well what they were talking about,—and there is little doubt that in such a course was wisdom, and it probably saved a good many lives. Nevertheless I doubt not but that there'd have been a devil of a rumpus had it leaked out at the time.

Whatever he heard from the *Halcyon*, the admiral kept his own counsel; and we went out to sea in single column of line ahead. All lights were, of course, carefully concealed, and we kept station quite six cables apart; the cruisers and catchers scouting ahead and outside of us; our course lying towards the Scillies.

As you may guess, there was little inclination to turn in on this, the first night of the war, and though I had to keep the morning watch, I went up on the quarter-deck, where our marine captain and several other fellows intended going to sleep under the quick-firing guns, so as to be on the spot if any attack took place. All the guns were cast loose and loaded, while boxes of ammunition stood about the decks in readiness for immediate use should they be required. The torpedo nets were not regularly out, as that would have prevented our steaming at anything like a respectable

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rate ; but they were triced up on the booms, ready to lower at very short notice. All round the bulwarks and in the fighting tops were men on the look-out, and the captain and commander were both on the bridge all the night, searching the horizon for hostile vessels, but up to two o'clock nothing had been sighted. The night was a thick one, and the officer of the watch several times lost sight of the "*Royal Quid*," which was our next ahead. Worked as the *Nelson* was from the afterbridge, it was hard enough to keep station at night even when position lights were used ; now, without even a stern light for guidance, the difficulty was trebled.

It must have been about six bells in the middle watch, that a great cloud passed over the vapourish moon, deepening the prevailing gloom. Through the clouds peeped a solitary star, a sickly-looking planet well-nigh overhead ; and as I gazed up at it the power of the situation fell upon me : it became the frowning eye of an evil Fate, luring and leading to trouble to come. I watched and shivered ; a presentiment of disaster stole upon me. For awhile I fought against it, but without much success ; feelings of this

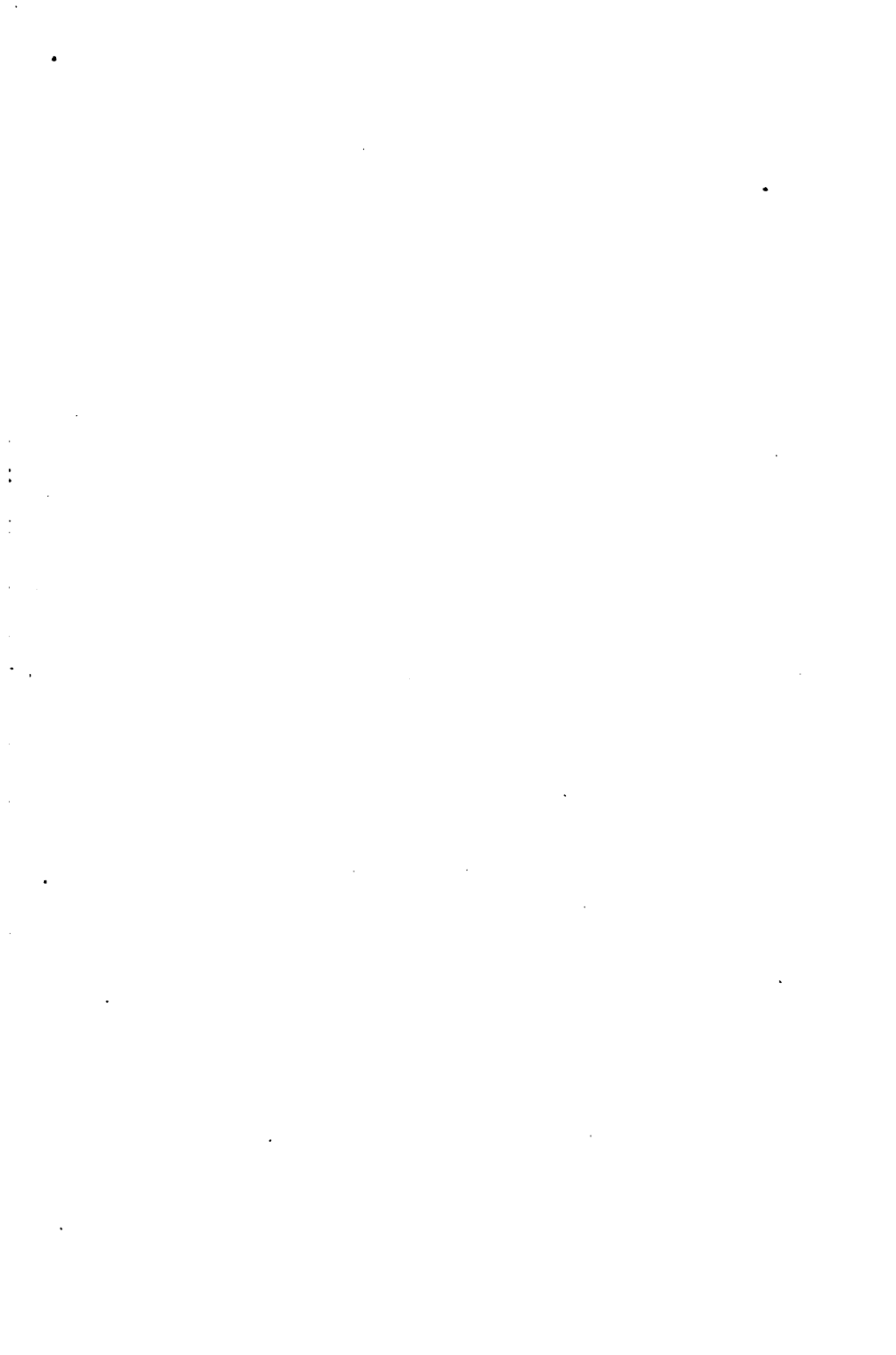
sort come of their own volition, and man is powerless to drive them away. And so the night wore on.

After a bit, I went below to try and get a drink of something, for I was smoke-dried as a limekiln, and also badly needed something to pull me together. As I made my way to the wardroom along the lower deck, half dazed by the sudden change from darkness to light, my nerves were all ajarred by a cry on deck—

“Torpedo-boat coming up astern!”

Bang went one of the after quick-firing guns, then came shot after shot in rapid succession, while between the firing came the sound of the boatswain's whistles, as the watch was called to man and arm ship.

I was borne on deck amid a crowd of half-awake blue jackets, who had been sleeping under arms in the main deck. It was dark as pitch, but in the flashes of the firing I could just make out our sides lined with men firing wildly in every direction. Round the hatchways were crowds of blue jackets and marines, tumbling over the gear and ropes, cursing, swearing, and yelling, their loaded rifles going off every now and again in their excitement. Our ship's company was largely





EVERY GUN ON OUR STARBOARD SIDE WAS DISCHARGED.

*Page 27.*

made up of boys from the *Boscawen* and Naval Reserve men, and most of these were quite overcome with panic. I rushed on to the afterbridge, remaining there some ten minutes while this pandemonium continued; then, the officers having by free use of their swords restored some sort of order, the firing was stopped, and an unnatural silence reigned. The skipper concluding that it had been a false alarm, called the men aft and gave them his mind in no very gentle terms; then, the rest of the fleet having disappeared altogether, he ordered the torpedo nets to be got out, having decided to lie to till daylight.

While this job was being seen to, I overheard the purser, who, with most of the non-executive officers, was standing by the chart-house, again offer his bet about torpedo-boats; in fact, they were all laughing about the late scene. The search-lights were now burning brightly, dancing over the water, but they revealed nothing save crested billows, till a chance beam fell on a small vessel to starboard apparently coming bows on towards us, and firing as she came. Every gun on our starboard side was discharged at her before any orders could be given, and some of the six-

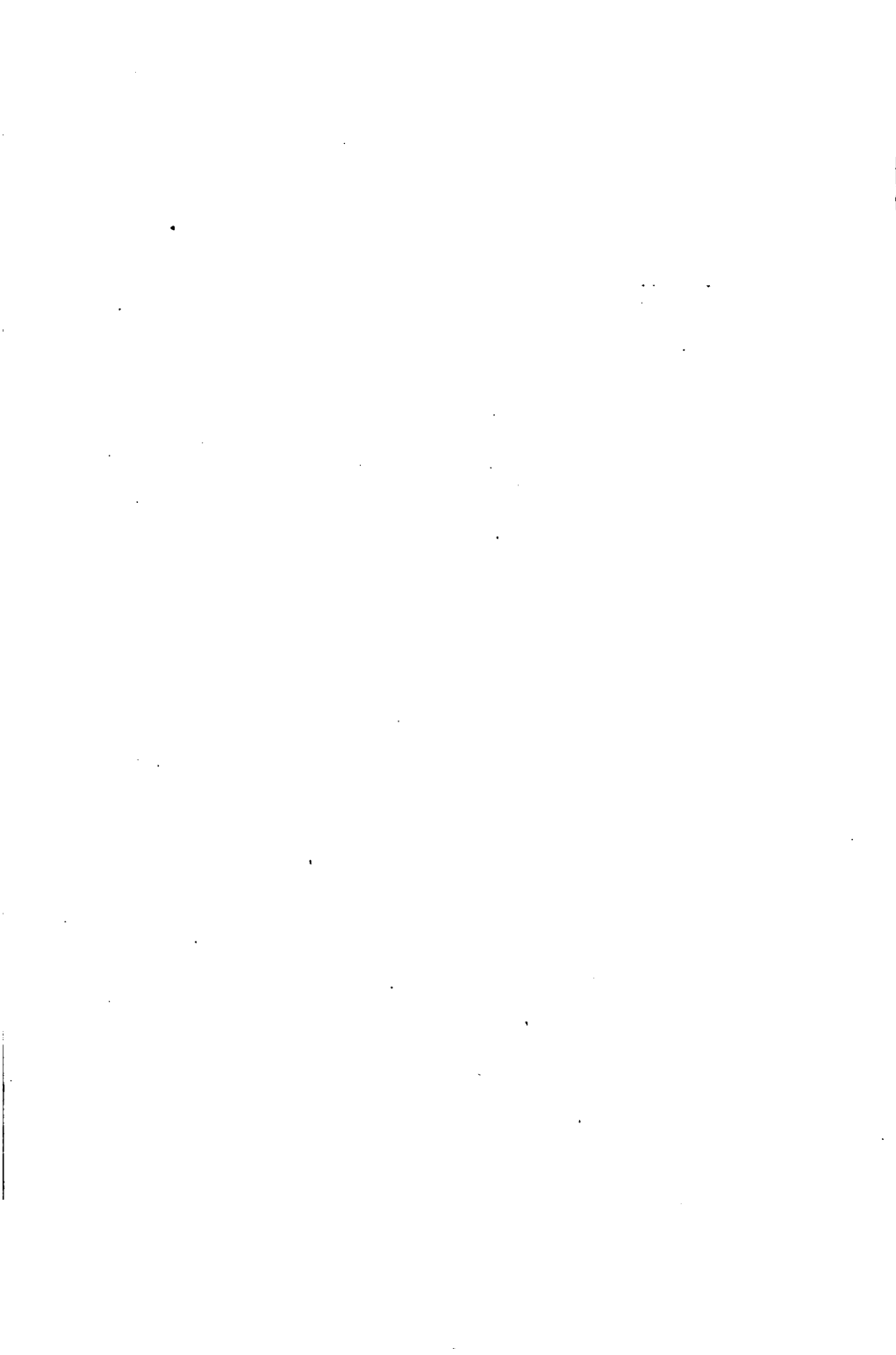
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pounders must have made good shooting ; for we saw her lurch heavily over on one side and begin to settle down, whereat our men cheered lustily and blazed away with renewed energy. It was but a momentary glimpse, for the port bow guns now began to fire, while a blue light burned from somewhere forward increased the smoke and blur around us. For one instant we saw a low black hull, belching sparks and flame from a red-hot funnel ; the next, a thunderstorm seemed to burst about us. Everyone was thrown violently to the deck ; guns, boats, and torpedo booms were flung in all directions, while from above, a mighty waterspout descending completely wrecked the afterbridge, washing everything into the starboard scuppers. The ship gave one awful trembling heave, and then fell back with a tremendous list to port. As I extricated myself from the wreckage, I saw Blake rush to a three-pounder Hotchkiss and plump a shot into the torpedo-boat, which had now come up quite close and opened fire on us with her machine guns. This, so far as I know, was the only shot discharged after the explosion. All order and discipline were at once lost, and a general *sauve qui peut* seemed the



A THUNDERSTORM SEEMED TO BURST ABOUT US.





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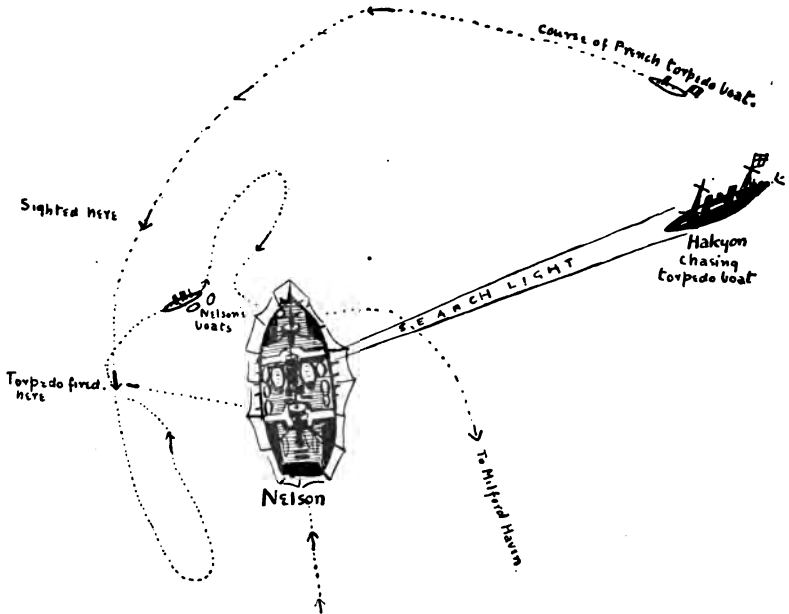
order of the day. Our mobilised crew had no cohesion, no trust in each other; the Reserve men, unused to any discipline, became more dangerous to their fellows than the foe was. Most of the officers had disappeared—the wave of the torpedo explosion had washed them away; and, to add to the confusion, a crowd of stokers—panic-stricken by the horrible scenes in the engine-room, against which the torpedo had burst,—came rushing madly up from below.

“Come along with me, Bouverie,” cried Blake, who ran past me at that moment. “Quick! there is not a moment to lose if we are to do anything at all.”

I started to follow him, forcing my way through the press, but I had not gone very far before something hit me a tremendous whack on the head, and I fell half dazed against the ruins of the chart-house, to lie there helplessly watching Blake, who seemed to be the only executive officer left, trying to get some sort of order. Men were jumping overboard in dozens; boats were being lowered that must have capsized as soon as they touched the water, so overcrowded were they; while all the time came the ping, ping of

bullets from the torpedo-boat tearing through wherever the men were thickest.

My servant, plucky, good-hearted fellow that he was, came up to me with a life-belt, and some-



PLAN OF TORPEDO ATTACK.

how got me into it. Scarcely had he done so when there came another rush, black heaving water bearing all before it; then, afar off, as it now seemed, I saw the old *Nelson's* bows

sliding rapidly under water, a search-light still burning, shooting its ray up towards the lowering sky above till it met that solitary evil star which still gazed calmly down upon the strife and turmoil below.

The cold water revived me, and I struck out for the scene of the wreck as well as I was able; hoping against hope that either one of our boats might have survived, or that the enemy might pick me up. As it chanced, I came across two boats tossing upside down in the violently agitated water, and these were crowded with men clinging to them. I hung on with the rest, glad indeed to have some companions in misfortune, and my gladness was increased when from the other boat I heard the voice of Blake bidding the men be of good cheer. I swam over to this boat and got a place beside him.

Before we could say anything, however, we spotted the *torpilleur de haute mer* steaming slowly towards us.

I was about to sing out to them, when Blake sternly ordered everyone to be silent. "I'm going to capture her," he said.

Under any other circumstances I think I should have laughed; but hanging by your

eyelids to a capsized whaler is no place for merriment, so I just made ready to obey any orders he might give.

"When I give the word, board her," said Blake in a whisper, and the order was passed to those clinging to the gig.

Soon the torpedo-boat was close upon us, and an officer on board called out to us in English to ask whether we surrendered.

"No!" shouted Blake. "Follow me, everybody who can swim," and he plunged into the water on what seemed to me the maddest forlorn hope that was ever entered upon. Yet, as it chanced, in its very madness lay our hope of success.

For a minute—a fatal minute to them—the Frenchmen simply stood still and stared at us; then, realising that the attack was in serious earnest, they began to fire at us with rifles, while their captain tried to make the boat steam away; but the *Nelson's* fire had not entirely missed her, and a shot somewhere near the engines had filled one compartment and reduced her speed to a crawl. Before they could do anything, the majority of us were upon them, clambering over her sides. We did not, of course, do this without loss.

Their skipper bowled over several of our men with his revolver, others were hurled back into the sea; but the space was too limited for the enemy to do much. A good twenty of us were quickly on the deck, and the nine or ten Frenchmen there had a very short shrift; in less time than it takes to write, the boat was in our possession and her crew prisoners.

Blake went to the helm, and, having sent some of our fellows down to keep the French stokers hard at it, steered for the spot where the *Nelson* had gone down, for we had drifted some way from there in the scuffle; and here we were fortunate enough to rescue about a dozen more men who still clung to bits of wreckage. Then we turned towards Milford, the white lighthouse on St. Anne's Head being just visible in the growing dawn.

On the way Blake and I exchanged experiences about the night's fighting, and I asked him how he came to hit on the wild idea that had been our salvation.

"Well," said he, "as soon as I knew the *Nelson* was done for, I ran to a Q. F. gun and put a shot into the torpedo-boat's engines, then I knew she wouldn't be able to get far

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away ; and I had doubts as to how many of our boats would live when the ship went under. Then I picked out as many marines and regular bluejackets as I could lay hands on, and just before the end we got into the water over the port side. Of course we all went down with the ship, but most of us came up again ; the rest you know. It's better than a French prison or Davy Jones's locker."

Then we fell to musing over those we should never see again, brother officers sent to their last account with hardly a moment's warning. Such thoughts will come, and make one take umbrage at that hollow mockery, the fortunes of war. Blake, even then, seemed a man well saved to the country ; but as for me, of what account was I, that I alone should be spared of the many so much more needed ? Plunged in these sad reflections, I paid little heed to what went on around me, and was quite startled to look up and see Blake waving a white flag. Following the direction of his gaze, I saw a cruiser coming up fast, while astern of her was the rest of our fleet ; the *Majestic* with a strange cruiser in tow, and the old *Thunderer* with her nose under water, towed by the *Resolution*.

We in the captured torpedo-boat were soon in tow also, and in this fashion reached Dale Harbour, and were able to get some tally of the previous night's work.

The *Majestic* had captured the French cruiser *Isly*, and sunk another, with little or no loss to herself; but, on the other hand, of our side, the *Nelson* was sunk; the *Thunderer* disabled; the *Iphigenia*, *Latona*, *Halcyon*, and *Gleaner* missing.

There was only too good reason to fear that the small ship sunk by the *Nelson* was the *Halcyon*, and the arrival of the missing *Iphigenia*, with some of this catcher's sailors whom she had picked up, put this beyond doubt. It was a particularly unpleasant reflection, but it is hard to see how it could have been avoided, since we employed search-lights to look for the enemy, instead of using them merely to keep hostile craft under observation after having been found by the naked eye; which, I take it, is their proper use. The men simply blazed at everything they saw caught in the search-light's beam.

We found that Dale Harbour had been full of torpedo-boats the night before, and one of them, having penetrated up the Haven as far



as Old Milford, had torpedoed the coal pier, presumably taking it for an ironclad in the darkness; some colliers had also been sunk, and Blake's own boat was likewise missing; so altogether it was perhaps just as well that we put to sea when we did.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY VICTORIES

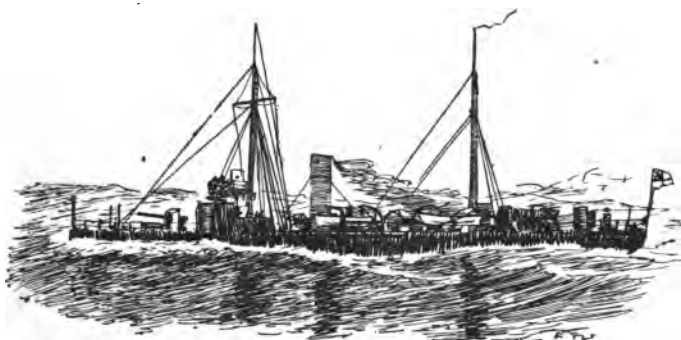


HAARDLY had we got the captured *Coureur* safely up to Pembroke, when there came a launch from the flagship with orders for us to take the earliest train possible to Portsmouth. It turned out that officers were terribly short there; and the Admiralty, driven by force of circumstances to rob Peter to pay Paul, had wired to all the home fleets to send as many officers as could be spared to help commission the ships they were bringing forward at the naval ports.

Blake and I, being now both unattached, were certainly not required at Milford, save for the court-martial on the loss of the *Nelson*. This, a hastily improvised affair, of course exonerated us from all blame in the matter,

and added as a rider some complimentary remarks about the capture of the *Coureur*.

Reaching Portsmouth, I found I was appointed to the catcher *Rattlesnake*, while Blake, to my great joy, was gazetted as her skipper. The *Rattlesnake* was not ready for sea when we reached her, but things were



H. M. S. "RATTLESNAKE."

shipshape enough for us to begin to settle down. At least, Blake did; for myself, that whack on the head which I got when the *Nelson* was torpedoed proved one too many for me now that the excitement was over; and I had to lie up for a day or two at Haslar. This was unfortunate, as I thus missed seeing the first sea-fight between

European ironclads, though I heard all about it a few days later from my shipmates. Hearing of a thing and seeing it are very different, however, and then at any rate, I chafed much at not having been able to witness the affair.

It was pretty dull at Haslar; I wasn't bad enough to be regularly laid up; and in these early days I had the place to myself, save for an old two-and-a-half striper laid up with a broken leg. Wounded by the French, *he* called it; but I ascertained afterwards that he had tumbled down a hatchway while buzzing round over coaling his ship. This old boy—I forget his real name, but they always called him "Blowhard" in the Service—was a pessimist of the deepest dye, and for ever pointing out to me what an evil omen for England was the sinking of the *Nelson*. He inquired eagerly of me as to how the men had behaved.

"I thought as much," he grunted, when I told him of the panic. "There's not a single bluejacket or marine worth his salt nowadays; the British Navy will be bust up altogether in a fortnight."

"But," I argued, "we had hardly any

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Service men on board. You can't expect boys on their first sea-trip, or Naval Reserve sailors who don't pay much heed to even their own officers, to behave like properly trained blue-jackets."

"All the same, all the same," he replied, "I tell you the Service has gone to the devil."

Nor would he listen to anything further that I would have urged. I'd heard of Blowhard before that day, however, and so could reckon his criticisms at pretty much their real value, and I don't think I was very much depressed by his evil prognostications.

Another time, when I was telling him how Blake had captured the French torpedo-boat, he suddenly turned on me and asked whether we expected to get our promotion over that job. I said that Blake, at any rate, had earned it.

"Don't you wish you may get it!" he replied. "Here's Blake gets his own torpedo-boat bunged up, goes off with you *Nelson* fellows and gets bunged up again, and then he has the luck to capture, by accident, a disabled torpedo-boat. You see if the Admiralty don't tell him that they'll cry quits on the business." Which was about what they did do.

Still old Blowhard, when he hadn't got his pessimistic fits on, was an interesting companion enough if he chose to condescend to talk to me. He was great on statistics of all kinds, and some of them I am quoting below.

When war broke out, the distribution of naval strength between the belligerents may be roughly tabulated as follows:—

	ENGLAND	FRANCE	RUSSIA	COMBINED
First class battleships . . . . .	20	12 + 6	=	18
Second ,, . . . . .	14	11 + 5	=	16
Third ,, . . . . .	10	6 + 0	=	6
Coast defence ,, . . . . .	12	16 + 15	=	31
<b>TOTAL BATTLESHIPS</b> . . . . .	<b>56</b>	<b>45 + 26</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>71</b>
Armoured cruisers . . . . .	18	8 + 8	=	16
Protected cruisers, 1st class . . . . .	11	3 + 1	=	4
,,     ,,   2nd & 3rd class . . . . .	53	18 + 3	=	21
<b>TOTAL CRUISERS</b> . . . . .	<b>82</b>	<b>29 + 12</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>41</b>
Look-out ships, &c. . . . .	19	12 + 1	=	13
Torpedo cruisers . . . . .	32	13 + 8	=	21
Torpedo-boat destroyers, sea-going and first class } . . . . .	102	185 + 58	=	243
torpedo-boats				
Second class torpedo-boats . . . . .	104	44 + 108	=	152

“This,” said old Blowhard, “is mostly tabulated from ‘Brassey’; of course, it’s entirely a paper scheme. We’ve more ships than they have away on foreign stations, for

one thing; for another, our coast defence ships aren't in it at all. I tell you what it is," he went on, getting, for him, quite enthusiastic: "I ought to have been Secretary to the Admiralty or something of that sort, for with these figures I'd prove that we outnumber the French and Russian two to one, or t'other way about, according to the needs of the Government. It's wonderful what a lot of juggling you can do over coast defenders, second class battleships, ships building, and ships projected!

"As a matter of fact, England has about thirty-two available battleships to pit against some seventy the enemy can bring against her; because they can use their old ships and coast defence ships, while we, being the attackers, cannot depend on any save our best sea-going vessels."

I was disputing this unpleasant fact as well as I could, when Blake came in, having run over to see how I was getting on.

"Draw it mild!" he said, having overheard Blowhard's last words. "I make it just the other way about. As far as ships and men are concerned, we've quite enough of the former, and the latter, though far too few, are as good as one

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can wish for. In the matter of battleships we've got twenty-eight good ships to put against their twenty-nine; and in cruisers we've a majority of three to one in the better ships. None of the old ships will count. England's right enough, if she only holds together, and Government and Parliament don't meddle with the Admiralty. Yes, England will come out of it all right; though it's very doubtful if any of us will live to see peace declared. And from then till the end of the world, the land-lubber critics will fill the newspapers and reviews with articles on how we ought to have done things."

Blowhard listened to him in silence, but if convinced, he didn't look it; or maybe, with Blake's final remarks in his mind's eye, he thought it little odds one way or the other.

"Well," remarked another lieutenant who had just come in for a yarn, "it's a precious good thing that the war has broken out when it has. Having so many ships in commission, we've been able to strike blows at once, and without any of the fatal delay the croakers, like our friend here, used to prophesy."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Blake, interrupting Blowhard's indignant refutation, "I'm a pretty hand at news-giving. Here I've just run over



to you fellows with the first news of the glorious victory of Cherbourg, and I clean forgot to tell it you."

"What victory—what?" we cried together.

"I thought as much; this is the last place in the world to hear of anything. Well, I've taken part in an ironclad fight; that is, I've looked on from outside, and felt beastly seasick."

"Hurry up and tell us all about the fight, and keep these scandalous confessions of a torpedo man's seaworthiness for the newspapers," said Blowhard.

Blake laughed good-humouredly, and proceeded to tell us, what we already knew; namely, that Admiral Barham had put to sea from Portland with the eight ironclads that had formed the C manœuvre fleet; and then went on to inform us how somewhere off Cherbourg was fought in a heavy gale the first serious battle between European ironclads.

The French, it appears, had seven ironclads and a couple of cruisers, and when sighted were apparently making for Cherbourg, to effect a junction with a fleet there. It transpired after the action that they had come out

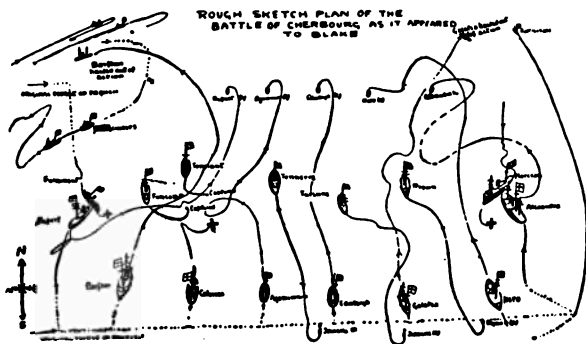
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from Brest; though how they managed to evade our Channel fleet, which was presumably watching that port, I cannot tell—it is one of those puzzling incidents of war that occur when least expected, and upset all calculations accordingly.

The *Rattlesnake* and catchers took no part in the fight, beyond scouting round the outskirts of it on the look-out for any torpedo-boats that might venture out even in such weather; and none of the cruisers seem to have been engaged. Our eight ironclads, five of them turret ships of somewhat ancient date, met the Frenchmen in the grey of the early morning; and the latter, out to get to Cherbourg and not for fighting, seem to have had little stomach for it from the first. The affair began at long bowls at a good 6000 yards range; and for an hour or so the ships fired at each other without doing any damage worth mentioning, aim being well-nigh impossible owing to the heavy seas running. Then, finding that the enemy were nearing Cherbourg, and dreading that the arrival of more French ships might spoil his plans, the British admiral altered course eight points, and steamed to close quarters in column of

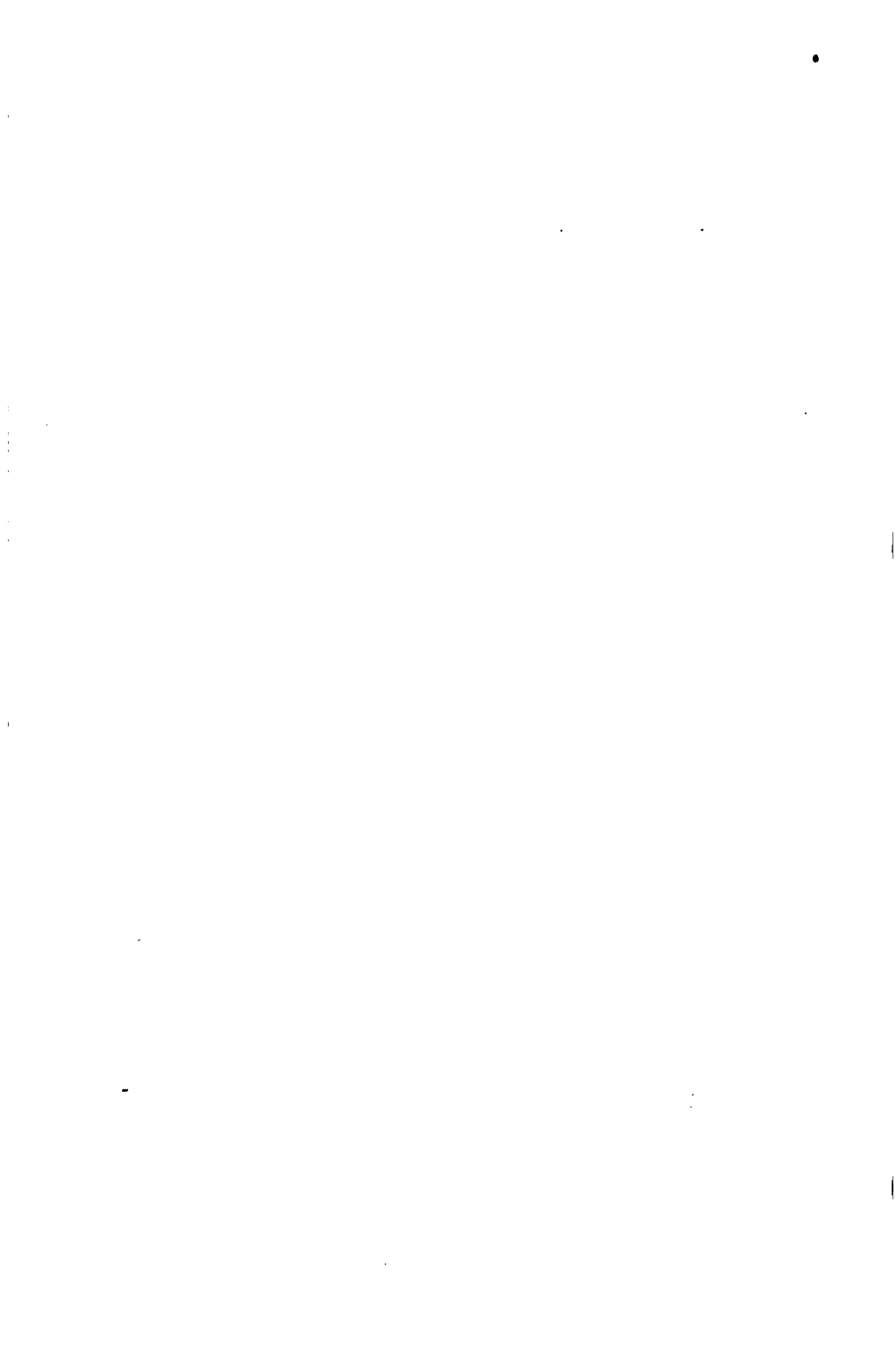
line abreast; the *Alexandra* and *Rupert*, the only two completely belted ships in the squadron,—which he had selected as leaders for this very reason,—forging slightly ahead before the moment of impact.

There being no help for it, our ships being the swifter, the French altered course likewise; and after a short pause, in which the two fleets



faced one another in silence, they went for each other at full speed.

Both sides being intent on ramming, machine and quick-firing guns were little used in the forward rush—at least not on our side; and the whole affair was over almost before the combatants realised that it had begun. At the last moment before the fleets closed,





THE PRESTIGE OF TRAFALGAR AND A THOUSAND OTHER FIGHTS DID ITS WORK.

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the prestige of Trafalgar and a thousand other fights did its work, and one or two of the enemy began to waver ; notably a large vessel at the port end of their line, which seems to have been the *Marceau*. She let fly at the *Alexandra* with her forward 34-centimetre gun, but that ship, being almost bow on, offered a small and uncertain target, and the projectile, passing her, struck the *Hero's* turret, where it burst without penetrating, though one of the 12-inch guns was damaged by it at the muzzle, and could not afterwards be fired. Before the *Marceau* could do anything more, the British flagship had come into her with a terrific crash that broke off the masts in both vessels, and upset some of the guns in the *Alexandra's* battery. The latter soon cleared the wreck, and, with such of her big guns as would work, immediately pounded into the Frenchman, who, gallantly replying, heeled over and sank with colours flying. The *Hero* and other ships following passed through the French, letting drive into them with all their guns that were behind armour—by the admiral's order, no machine guns other than those in the fighting tops, and no big guns unprotected by armour, were used.

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At the other end of our line, the *Rupert*—which had been specially designed for ramming—plunged into the *Fulminant* and sank her; and neither the *Rupert* nor the *Alexandra* seem to have sustained any structural injury worth mentioning from the shock. It was far otherwise with the *Colossus*, which, in attempting to ram the *Furieux*, carried away everything like matchboard as far as the foremast, where her belt began; with the result that she capsized the moment she cleared the enemy's ship. The *Furieux* remained afloat, but was shortly afterwards captured, being waterlogged and unable to steam away.

The other attempts to ram were ineffectual; the *Barfleur*, which had tried to ram the *Furieux* before the *Colossus*, and missed her, had her rudder carried away by the ram of the *Tonnant*, though she was not otherwise hurt by it. As the Frenchmen passed under her stern, the *Barfleur's* after barbette guns were fired down into her, but they could not be depressed enough to do any vital hurt. A 40-pounder shell, however, penetrated to the *Tonnant's* engine-room, and, disabling their motive power, brought about her capture; but not before she had considerably damaged the

British ironclad amidships. The *Galatea*, which, had she followed the admiral's orders implicitly, would have been unable to fight a single gun, attempted to engage the *Turenne*, with the result that her unprotected battery was put out of action in five minutes; and but for the return of the *Alexandra* to her assistance, she must have been captured or destroyed.

The French ships which had got through had now nothing between them and Cherbourg, but instead of running for it, they turned round and gallantly continued the fight. Once, or possibly twice, the fleets charged again, but the field of action was now much wider, and ironclads passed each other in vain attempts to ram. The sea, rising every minute, made aim more and more difficult, only chance shots told, but of these a large proportion hit the ships under the waterline as they rolled. Every vessel sustained serious damage in this way, and soon the ironclads, busily pumping out the tons of water that flooded many compartments, left each other alone. Neither side was completely vanquished, but neither was capable of inflicting much more damage on the other.



The scouts now signalled French ships coming up on the horizon, so the admiral deemed it wiser to withdraw with his battered ships and prizes, instead of pursuing the enemy so near to large reinforcements. With the *Galatea*, *Furieux*, and *Tonnant* in tow, he proceeded back to Portland; the first sea-fight of the war having resulted in a great British victory. Of the French ships only three escaped; while the British lost but one battleship, though both the *Galatea* and *Barfleur* were too damaged to be of much service for some time to come. This last-named ship had suffered severely amidships, where a couple of big shells from the *Tonnant* had worked indescribable havoc, setting her on fire and destroying all the upper works. Had the men been at the guns instead of under cover, the loss of life would have been terrible; as it was, the number of men *hors de combat* in the British squadron was far less than might have been expected—insignificant, indeed, compared to what had been so frequently predicted.

The *Alexandra*, though she had borne the brunt of the action, had lost but eleven men killed and wounded; while the *Rupert's*

casualties were even less. The *Galatea*, on the other hand, had fifty men killed outright and almost a hundred wounded. In the captured French ships this loss was even exceeded, as they had tried to fight their machine guns; and the crews, being thus exposed, had been destroyed wholesale by splinters and bits of shell. In very few cases was the armour of any ship penetrated.

“Well,” said Blowhard, after we had listened to Blake’s account, told in far more graphic language than I can put it in,—“well, that just goes to prove what I said, or meant to have said, a few minutes ago. The *Barfleur* and *Galatea*, our most modern ships, get bunged up, the only modern French iron-clad, the *Marceau*, gets sunk. What price our modern navy?”

“’Tisn’t a case likely to occur again,” Blake replied, “and it’s more coincidence than any-else. If the fight proves anything, it shows the value of armour, the value of superior numbers, and possibly the value of complete belts. Sandwiched into a fleet of Noah’s arks, the modern battleship has no chance to use her special qualifications, and we can’t judge her by this fight. However, whatever the

ironclads may do to each other, you'll find that the torpedo-boat will be the ultimate factor."

After a good deal more of this discussion, Blake took his leave, and Blowhard and I settled down to read the papers which had just arrived, laughing much at their "high falutin" descriptions of "A Modern Trafalgar," as some of them were ill advised enough to call the Cherbourg affair.

There was much joy in England that night, and the news of the "Great Victory of Cherbourg" was rung far and wide throughout the Empire; it was felt on all hands that Britannia still ruled the waves. The nation was delighted, testifying to its joy by shouting the choruses of patriotic songs in the music halls, ninety-four civilians volunteered for service with the fleets, and some seventy battleships and cruisers were laid down in public and private yards, though, of course, the war was over long before any of them could be used.

I give here a list of the combatants from an old newspaper that I have by me; as far as I can recollect, it is tolerably accurate:—

## BRITISH.

DATE OF LAUNCH.	NAME.	TONS DIS-PLACEMENT.	THICKEST ARMOUR.	HEAVIEST GUNS.	NO. OF GUNS.	CASUALTIES.	FATE.
1876	Alexandra	9490	12	22 ton	18	11	
1882	Agamemnon	8660	18	38 ton	6	9	
1873	Rupert	5440	14	M. L. 22 ton	4	8	
1892	Barfleur	10500	12	29 ton	14	31	disabled, set on fire
1885	Colossus	9420	18	45 ton	9	190 drowned	sunk
1885	Edinburgh	9420	18	45 ton	9	2	
1886	Hero	6200	12	45 ton	6	4	
1888	Galatea	5600	12	22 ton	12	147	disabled totally

## FRENCH.

1883	Furieux	5700	20	48 ton	2	183	captured
1887	Marceau	10581	18	52 ton	21	?	sunk
1880	Tonnant	4707	18	48 ton	2	149	captured
1879	Turenne	6400	10	16 ton	12	?	disabled
1875	Tonnere	5700	13	28 ton	2	?	
1885	Requin	7200	19½	75 ton	2	?	
1877	Fulminant	5651	13	23 ton	6	?	sunk

The English ships had a superiority in quick-firing guns, but, as before stated, these were little if at all used. Neither side appears to have fired torpedoes—the risk of hitting friends was considered too great.

After this fight, reorganised somewhat,—

augmented and altered,—the Portland fleet watched Cherbourg, where the French battle-ships remained in safety and refused to come out; while at the Nore a fleet was got together for the Baltic, consisting at first of the battle-ships *Royal Oak*, *Renown*, *Repulse*, *Edinburgh*, *Temeraire*, and *Hero*, ten cruisers and some torpedo-boats. By and by it was joined by the old ironclads, *Northampton*,<sup>1</sup> *Monarch*, *Iron Duke*, *Swiftsure*, and *Triumph*; but some little time elapsed before these were got to sea, for both men and material were sadly deficient. I don't know where they got the crews from at all; numbers of their people were fishermen or landsmen out of work, who made but indifferent sailors; for though they learned the work more quickly than was expected of them, they lacked the cohesion and mutual self-confidence which only long service together in fair weather and foul can bring about in a ship's company. We recognise this now, and even our R.N.R. men have their own special ship and ship's

<sup>1</sup> At the time war broke out, this ship was in commission as a sea-going training-ship. All her crew were drafted to other vessels within a week, and when recommissioned later, she was filled with recruits. My brother had the bad luck to be appointed to the ship for her new commission.

company; but it was very different in those days. However, the fleet in the Baltic fought no action just then, for the Russians kept quiet in Cronstadt—the menace of our torpedo-boats is said to have kept them inactive, since the Russians at that time looked upon these little craft with considerable dread. This information I write from recollection of articles in the *Times*; personally I think this was all buncombe, and am inclined to think that our British prestige had a lot more to do with it than anything else.

Another point in our favour was the bad weather just at that time. We British were supposed to do things in all weathers; and I well remember, some few years before, our catchers manœuvring in the teeth of a gale, when those of any other nation would have run for harbour; and it was the life on board these small ships that kept the old spirit of the British sailor alive. Hence, when our cruisers met the enemy in dirty weather, they went for them without delay, while these were thinking more about getting comfortably into harbour than fighting battles, and so hostile vessels almost invariably got captured or destroyed. You see,

it was a point of honour in the Service to either win or go to the bottom ; and the way in which one of our second class cruisers would attack a first class one of the enemy's made them shy of us. It wasn't that they were less brave than our fellows ; it was simply that they never knew what to expect, or when they were safe from attack. Of course, we occasionally lost ships in this way ; but they had generally rendered a pretty good account of themselves first ; so that victories against us were apt to be Pyrrhic ones.

The way Jowke got his promotion was a case in point. He was an old stager, with thirteen years' service or more, and had long given up hopes of getting his three stripes. They made him lieutenant-commander of the *Icarus*, a useless old tub enough, with only twelve knots "Brassey speed," and an actual speed of about eight or so at that period. Pottering about outside Portsmouth a day or two after the war broke out, he fell in with a French cruiser of 2400 tons, more than double the size of his ship. The enemy signalled him to surrender, but instead of that, he hoisted every ensign he had on board

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and went into action. They blew his ship nearly inside out, and then tried to ram him, which he let them do; then all his ship's company, stokers and everybody, rushed on board the *D'Estaing*, and after a hard fight captured her deck. Shutting down the fellows below, he steamed back to Portsmouth, with all but nine of his own crew killed or badly wounded, and his own *Icarus* at the bottom of the Channel. This, happening so early in the war, made a great impression on the enemy; and Jowke got his extra stripe almost immediately—wherein he was luckier than many men, who got theirs when all was over, and there were no ships left to command.

Every one was anxious to emulate Jowke, and this incident did as much good as a great victory.

Another episode of these early days was the case of Captain —— (I suppress his name, as he is still living) of the *T*——. He fell in with the *Dupuy de Lôme*, a heavily armoured cruiser, and, getting the very first shot into his engines, was completely disabled. He struck his flag, but before the capture could be properly effected, the



*Blenheim* and two other of our cruisers came up unexpectedly, so the Frenchman made off, leaving some of his own men in the *T*— in his haste. Captain — had struck to overwhelming odds, and got off all right at the court-martial; but everyone in the service cut him for having surrendered.

This first week of the war also saw the destruction of the much-vaunted Russian Mediterranean fleet. Our Vice-Admiral there had had his eye on them from the first, and fell on them with his whole fleet somewhere off the coast of Sicily directly war was declared. The *Pamyat Azova* escaped to Toulon; but the *Dmitri Donskoi*, *Alexander II.*, and *Admiral Nachimoff* were transferred to the British flag, and manned with drafts from the other English vessels and soldiers from the Malta garrison.

Completely —  
 beyond ships? —  
 The Russians had five ironclads (excluding the two useless *Popoffkas*) in the Black Sea; these remained shut up there, and unavailable for the time being. At sea we seemed likely to have things all our own way; the enemy's cruisers were fast disappearing, and the merchant traffic suffered but little injury after the first ten days. We had blocked the

Suez Canal, and the Asiatic and Australian trade, to the value of over £200,000,000 per annum, was diverted round the Cape of Good Hope.

Things on shore were not going so well. A sort of chaos was falling on the Admiralty, hampered as it was by Parliamentary interference, and by the economy necessary in view of the possible advent of a general election. The dearth of capable seamen and stokers was severely felt, and bitter were the longings for something like the *inscription maritime* of the French; it was even mooted in Parliament, to be rejected, however, as incompatible with the institutions of a free country. Press-gangs were also proposed, but the measure was, of course, negatived; nevertheless, some captains did a little press-ganging on their own account, but that was later.

“Here we have a body of men, presided over by highly paid officials,” said an M.P. who had gained notoriety for these sort of remarks,—“a body of men who for years have eaten their heads off in idleness. Let them do their work, there are quite enough of them without our having to pay any more.”

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Outrageous as this view was, it only put into words the thoughts of a large section of the community, into whose souls the poison of the mercantile spirit had sunk deep.

"War is a crime, and but murder by wholesale; it is our duty to try and stop it by every means in our power—and peace means cheap bread again," said yet another section, whose *raison d'être* probably lay in the last few words.

A still more serious thing was the attitude of the labour party, which had considerable weight with the Government. "War is but the game of kings," said their leaders; "you and yours have no part in it." In order to carry on the Government, all these parties had to be conciliated, and all the evils of party Government came to the fore. And so, though the outside of the nut was firm and strong, the kernel was rotten and eaten out by the worm of democracy, half-educated and totally unable to appreciate the great issues at stake. These were the opinions of Lieutenant Blake, our skipper, not my own; I concerned myself little with things outside my profession. But Blake, representing as

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he did the *fin de siècle* British naval officer, was before all things a scientific and highly educated man. He and his cronies were not slow to air their opinion in the fleet, "that the only thing that could save the country was the vesting of the supreme control in the Service instead of in the civilian element"; and press correspondents who heard these views, ventilated them in the papers they represented — whether from conviction or merely for the sake of matter I cannot say; it depended a good deal on what their papers wanted, I suppose.

It did little good anyway, though it afforded subject matter for the contents bills of the halfpenny evening papers—

**INSULT TO THE DEMOCRACY.**

**OVERBEARING CONDUCT OF NAVAL OFFICERS.**

**JACK TAR WANTS TO RULE THE ROOST.**

—and such like headlines.

However, in these early days, everything seemed right enough on the sea; but Blake and his brother officers saw deeper below the surface, and were far from optimistic even then; and the sequel proved them to be true prophets.

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Perhaps, however, the maddest of all the mad things that happened at that time was the dispute about the Mediterranean—a dispute started by an M.P., and carried on by other civilians, as to whether or no it would be advisable to abandon our position there at once. This argument made a great noise; all the newspapers and then the House of Commons discussed it. Eventually a motion was carried that the Mediterranean should be abandoned forthwith, in utter disregard of the fact that the presence of our fleet there occupied the attention of fully two-thirds of the French vessels.

Fortunately, the Admiralty refused to be dictated to, notwithstanding the shrieking denunciations of the "abandoners," as the party opposed to our maintaining a Mediterranean fleet were called; but the incident showed how great were the dangers looming ahead. Most of us in the Service agreed with old Glatton, the port admiral at Portsmouth, who said that he thought it would be a good thing for the country to invite the leading spirits in the discussion for a sea-trip and drop them overboard in mid-Channel. Well, it would have put an end to most of the gas

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that hampered the Navy, anyway. While all this was going on, plenty of exciting smaller incidents were taking place, and to describe these, I must take the reader back to almost the beginning of the war.

## CHAPTER III

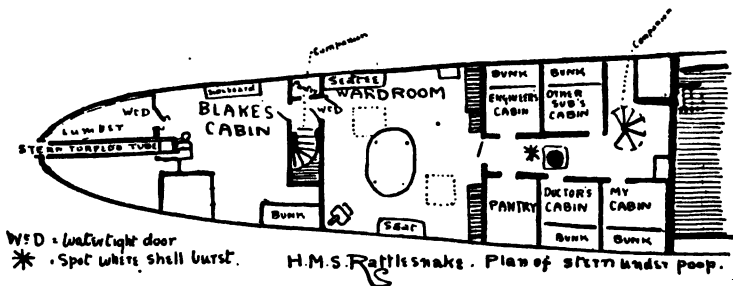
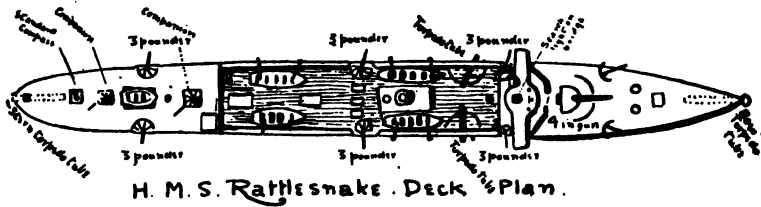
### THE RESCUE OF A SWEETHEART



JOINED the *Rattlesnake* on August 19th, just after the battle of Cherbourg. The *Ratto*, as we called her in the Service, was a torpedo-catcher of 550 tons displacement, carrying one 4-inch Q. F. gun,<sup>1</sup> and six 3-pounder quick-firers. Her horse-power was 2700, which gave a nominal speed of not more than 19 knots, but she could make about that in all weathers, and so was practically one of the best ships in the Service for speed, while her engines had never broken down in any way; the vessels of the *Havock* class were indeed far swifter, but they were not so sea-going as the good old *Ratto*.

<sup>1</sup> This gun was only put in position when they hastily fitted the ship for sea; she had previously carried an ordinary 4-inch B. L. gun.

Lieutenant Blake was a man full of pet ideas about everything, and when I joined, some of these had been put into execution. Around the guns he had piled sandbags; chains had been slung over the sides amid-



ships; while over guns and everything hung a light awning, the object of which I was at a loss to conceive, till the captain explained that, in his opinion, men would fight with more assurance under cover, and that even this slight awning gave a feeling of protection



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that would be valuable in action. Our complement all told was 70. We acted as a sort of division-boat to three torpedo-boats, Nos. 82, 84, and 86 respectively. If these went out to seek the enemy, we were to accompany them, and either lead the attack, or lie a bit astern as a protection and rallying-point, as the case might need. Should we be employed in protecting a fleet, two boats were to keep with us while the third coaled. This arrangement was a compromise to those who held that the torpedo-boat was the proper answer to the torpedo-boat; and looking back at it all after the lapse of years, I think it was about the best thing. The new catchers of the *Havock* type came in very handy for this sort of work, but there were not enough of them ready for sea, when war broke out, to do all the work required; practically, one was needed for every ironclad.

Now it is all over, it does seem a thousand pities that they didn't send a big fleet of catchers and torpedo-boats into Cherbourg. Going *en masse*, we'd have got in somehow, and done for the lot of them, though likely enough nobody would have come out of it; still we were ready and willing to try it, had

they only given us the chance. Instead of that, most of us nursed the battleships—and did nothing.

It must not be supposed that we had an easy time of it, however; scouting for torpedo-boats was arduous work, and none the less so because nothing, at first, came in our way. The night the *Empress of India* was torpedoed, for instance, we were entirely out of it, and did not see a single hostile boat, though several were about; we had all the monotony of looking for boats, without the excitement of chasing them.

That first week or so of the war was an anxious time for those who had relatives and friends at sea, for the enemy's cruisers were then playing Old Harry with the merchant service, and numberless ships and liners were overdue. One of the newspapers had a terribly pathetic article about the people waiting, waiting, waiting at the piers and places where the steamers used to come in in peace-time, and of how they went on watching day after day, night after night, for the ships that never came, and never would come now. Save for an occasional warship going in or out of harbour, the waters

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were as deserted as the ocean in the " Ancient Mariner."

No man felt more keenly about these missing merchantmen than our skipper, since the girl he was engaged to was homeward bound in the *Valetta*, which had left Gib just before the declaration of war. The *Valetta* was a fastish boat, subsidised by the Admiralty, and her captain reckoned on getting into port before war broke out; though likely enough he didn't expect it to happen at all—no one did, for the matter of that. She was more than a week overdue now, and the chances of her safe arrival were getting infinitesimal.

It must have come as a relief to the skipper when we were sent to sea to cruise independently, instead of the everlasting patrolling round the fleet. Our orders were to scout down-Channel, capture any inferior craft we might encounter, but carefully avoid an engagement with a superior force. This we could easily do, as, if necessary, we were able to show a clean pair of heels to most things afloat, certainly to any ship likely to be able to damage us.

"Show heels be damned!" said Blake, as he read the slate. "The French have a darned

sight too many cruisers, and if we meet one, I'll try and find out whether the *Ratto* can't give her beano!" and in this spirit we weighed and put to sea. It was a trying moment all the same; the possibilities of the future seem so much nearer and greater in a small ship. In a big ironclad one has so many messmates and creature comforts that one leaves the future to look after itself; but in a frail little craft like the *Ratto*!—well, I couldn't contemplate going into action without wondering whether anyone could possibly survive, and I experienced all sorts of sensations that had been foreign to me in the poor old *Nelson*.

"Feeling a bit blue, eh, old man?" remarked Blake, who was inspecting the conning-tower as I came off the forecastle, where I had lingered a bit after getting up anchor.

"Well, sir," I made reply, "one does feel a bit sick at the thought of never seeing home and dear ones again. Of course a fellow is prepared to do his duty and all that, but, as you yourself said in the *Nelson*, 'There's precious small chance of anyone coming out of it.'" For, to tell the truth, I was in a devil of a funk.

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"Well, that's merely one way of looking at it. For my own part, I'm also one of those fatalistic Johnnies who hold that a man can't die before his time, do what he will; though," he added in a sadder tone, "maybe there are times when one wishes it would come along." Then, as his manner was, he left me abruptly, going up on the bridge; while I went below and fell in with the doctor, who was fresh from Haslar, and a mighty enthusiast. He had the wardroom table covered with murderous-looking knives and instruments, the different uses of which he was explaining to our engineer.

"I'll tell you what, my son," he was saying, "you'll bless me by and by, all of you. I've brought a private stock of chloroform, for the Admiralty only allow about enough for one operation."

Poor little blue-eyed doctor, with his saws and anæsthetics! he never got a chance to use them. We thought him rather an officious little ass then, yet he proved himself a hero when he died.

We steered in a bee-line for Plymouth, altering course near the Eddystone about five hours later. A white fog had been coming

on, and near to sunset-time it was so thick that we had to reduce speed to six knots or thereabouts.

As we were thus going along, we heard the sound of distant firing, and, cracking on full speed, the *Ratto* made in the direction whence it seemed to proceed. The noise rapidly increased in volume, but we were unable to locate it; when suddenly the fog lifted, and there, right ahead of us, crimson in the setting sun, were a couple of ships firing at each other. It was the first sea-fight I had ever seen; and the impression of it is as vivid in my memory as though it were yesterday. Two black ships,—one of them apparently our *Warspite*,—near together, slowly following each other round and round in a circle. From their sides and tops came incessant flashes, a thin film of smoke from the cordite ammunition wreathed and twisted astern of them; while under the *Warspite's* quarter lay a second class torpedo-boat, following her motions, and presumably waiting for an opportunity to slip out and torpedo the enemy's vessel.

Long before we could reach them the fog-curtain came down again thicker than ever, so

they were lost to our ken ; and, night having fallen, we were unable to find them, although the sound of firing continued for another half-hour, when it suddenly ceased. By and by the fog lifted once again, but we saw nothing more of the ships, though we passed the early part of the night cruising as near as we could guess in the same place ; then, giving it up as a bad job, we went on our way.

Once we sighted a cruiser, but she turned out to be a friend. This was just as I came on the bridge to take the morning watch for the skipper, who, having been on the bridge since six o'clock on the previous night, turned in all standing for a short rest. We saw nothing more till about three bells, then our look-out notified a large merchantman steaming hard on the port bow, and I altered course in her direction. Before we had neared her appreciably, and ere she had noticed us, I fancy, a warship loomed up in pursuit ; and even as we looked there came a fire-tongue from her bow, followed by a splash in the water ahead of the first steamer, which replied with a gun mounted somewhere aft, and at the same time ran up the British blue ensign.

A second shell from the pursuer burst in the

merchantman amidships, and must have damaged her, for though she still steamed on, her speed was much reduced.

At the first alarm I had, of course, had the skipper called; and the crew were all at quarters in less than no time. The excitement was intense.

Blake, who had been intently watching the steamer through his binoculars, laid them down with a hoarse cry—"Good God! it is the *Valetta*!—Lucy, Lucy, how we meet again!"

The enemy, the French *Davout*, was now rapidly coming up: firing ever and again at the *Valetta*, which replied irregularly, and without any effect, so far as we could make out. The *Davout*, a protected cruiser of over 3000 tons, carried fourteen guns of sorts to our seven; she had six 16-centimetre guns against our solitary Long Tom, so that it appeared little less than suicidal for us to attack her; but the traditions of the British Navy demanded that we should do so. Probably this reason counted second with our skipper; fate had placed it in his power to strike a blow for the woman he loved, and, confident in his preconceived plans, he went into action with a light heart.



Hitherto the *Davout* had taken absolutely no notice of us ; in our disguise she probably took us for a collier tramp who could be picked up afterwards at leisure, but a shot from our Long Tom as she came into range undeceived her. Before she had recovered her surprise, we were pretty well out of reach, and the broadside she sent in our direction did no damage.

"It won't be possible to play that game again," said Blake. "I guess that shell of ours made things hum !"

The captain of the *Davout* seemed undecided whether to continue the pursuit of the *Valetta*, or to turn aside first and destroy the puny antagonist astern of him. He must have leant towards the latter course, for he slowed down, thus enabling the merchantman to get out of range, but not before another French shell had hit her ; and we clenched our teeth in anger, as we thought of the terrible havoc that missile must have wrought on the decks crowded with defenceless passengers.

"By God ! you shall pay for this," muttered Blake, as he himself trained our 4-inch gun upon the cruiser. "Fire !"

The shell struck the enemy, which, in

stopping to turn, had just come into range again, and burst somewhere forward ; but we could not see what damage we had done. She still continued to turn as before, letting fly a broadside of three guns at us as she did so. Bow on as we were, the target we offered was exceedingly small, and none of the projectiles hit us ; though we felt the wind of one that passed overhead.

“Every man under cover!” yelled the skipper ; and, going into the conning-tower, he put the helm hard a-port, using the screws to assist him to turn. But before the *Rattlesnake* had quite got round, a shell from the enemy hit us somewhere astern, bursting against the base of the mainmast, which it brought down, and wrecking the steward’s pantry and engineer’s cabin.

A minute or two later we were out of dangerous range, and I was sent below to report damage. On the floor of the wardroom, amidst the wreckage, lay the doctor, wounded unto death ; and near him the sick-bay man, moaning in agony, his right leg shattered to a bloody pulp. As I crawled over the débris, the doctor opened his eyes, and, struggling on his knees towards some bandages and instru-

ments, asked me in a voice little more than a faint whisper to bring the wounded man to him. Poor chap, it was his last effort; even as he made it, he fell back with a rattle in his throat and died.

Calling a couple of hands, I made the wounded sick-bay man as comfortable as we could under the circumstances, which I am afraid was not much; but since we all expected to join the doctor in a few minutes, it didn't seem to matter much. For none of us had much faith in the captain's plan.

Discovering that she could not get within range of us,—although nominally a knot faster in speed,—the *Davout* again slowed down; presumably hoping to entice us within reach. Again we turned, facing the enemy bow to bow. All this time our ship had been getting more and more round to the eastward; and just before turning, I noticed the sky ahead of us a glorious glow of colour; the golden edge of the sun lifting above the inky black water as we circled round.

Finding that we were not to be drawn nearer, the enemy commenced to go about again, evidently intent on pursuing the *Valetta*, which was still well in sight.

“Stand by the starboard torpedo tube yourself, Bouverie,” sang out the skipper to me, “and fire when I give the word. You will hear me yell to you from the conning-tower, but, of course, if anything unforeseen happens, you must use your own judgment. I am going down to torpedo her in the path of the sun.

“Every one else under cover, and lie down, every man jack of you !

“Go ahead as fast as you can !” I heard him yell down the tube to the engine-room a minute later. We had a tremendous head of steam, and our speed must have been quite twenty miles an hour ; reckoning the enemy to be about eight thousand yards off, it would take us some fifteen minutes or less to get within torpedo distance of her, and then—

The sun, dead astern of us, was now just above the horizon, and his golden rays tipped the foam and mist that clung about our shrouds till they seemed bespangled with glittering jewels. The rigging hummed with the wind of our rush, the engines throbbed and palpitated till I could scarce hold on to the torpedo-tube ; but I thought of none of these things. Instead thereof, I seemed to

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see another morning a fortnight or so ago, with the same sun just rising and catching on a girl's white dress as she stood on the landing-stage at Milford, waving a handkerchief to a steam launch dashing away down harbour to the *Nelson*. All else passed from me, and as in a dream I heard the pattering of machine gun bullets and the wild screech and splash of the shell. Then a cry from somewhere, "Look out, starboard torpedo tube!" brought me to myself again; we gave a great swerve to port, ahead of me over the low bulwarks I saw a huge hull wreathed in smoke and flashes, shining and glimmering in the sunshine, like a great gold mirror set up in the sea.

A moment later I had her in the sights of the director. The torpedo flashed out; the noise of the firing ended itself in a mighty roar and a wave that broke over our bulwarks and set everything awash; then came a sudden, unnatural calm.

I struggled to my feet to look astern, being almost knocked over, as I did so, by the rush of bluejackets to man the Q. F. guns. But there was no need to use them, for the *Darvout* would fire her guns never more. The great





**SLOWLY THE GREAT SHIP WENT DOWN, HER STRUGGLING BURDEN CROWDING HER HULL  
BESEECHING FOR AID THAT CAME NOT!**

cruiser had her nose under water, and with propellers wildly splashing in the air, slowly went over on her side. We had described a sort of semicircle meanwhile—she was now only a cable or so distant from us. Some of the crew we could see frantically trying to get out boats, a white flag was being waved to us, and hands stretched out appealingly. Nearer yet we drew, till we could look upon their faces—hardy Breton seamen jumping into the sea. Slowly the great ship went down, her struggling burden crowding her hull, beseeching for aid that came not!

“For God’s sake, sir, send them a boat!” cried I to Blake, who was now standing on the bridge watching the sinking vessel.

“What can we do? We cannot risk having all those prisoners aboard us. We can leave them such of our boats as will swim, after the ship has gone down; till then we can do nothing.”

And, indeed, it was only too true! We could not crowd our decks with prisoners who would be twenty to one against our little deck watch, nor could we even approach nearer without grave risk of being sucked down by the foundering *Davout*.



Presently, with a great explosion and one awful cry of agony, she went down, and then we steamed over the spot. We lowered the only two boats that would swim—these we had just turned outwards with considerable difficulty—into the struggling mass of men and deck-hamper. Numbers clutched at our rungs and the bits of chain and rope that hung from the ship's sides, praying us for the love of God to save them, and some few of these we hauled on board; but the greater number we had to leave to their fate.

Then, and not till then, did we notice the *Valetta*, which, under slight sail, had drifted down to us before the wind. Her engines were apparently disabled, and, judging from the streams of water that spurted from her sides, she was leaking badly as well.

We got up within hail of her, and these must have been anxious moments for our skipper, as he eagerly scanned the faces of the passengers who crowded her decks, gazing on the horrible sequel to their deliverance.

"Can you keep afloat?" hailed our skipper.

"I think so, but our engines are disabled. Can you take us in tow, sir?"

"Very good. Is Miss Monckton safe?"

“Who?”

“Miss Monckton — passenger — General Monckton’s daughter.”

The answer was indistinct; and as we steamed up yet nearer, Blake ordered out the dingy, which had luckily escaped destruction when the mainmast fell. He was over the side waiting for it almost before it touched the water, calling to me to come with him.

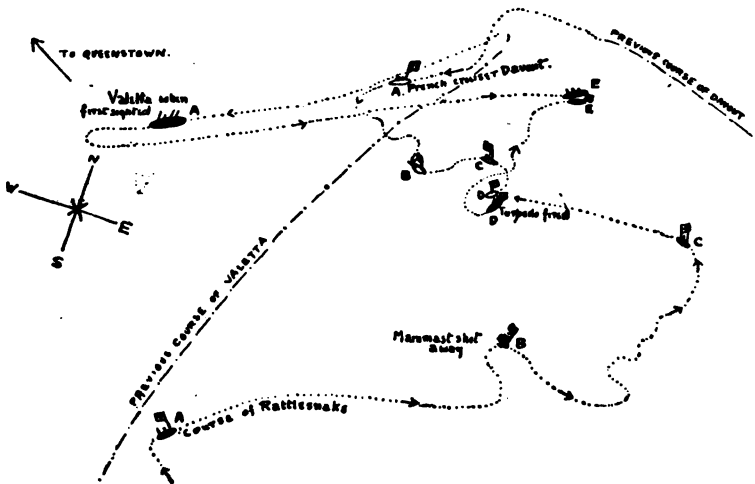
“Steer the boat, Bouverie,” he said; “my nerves are all ajar. Look here, you arrange with these fellows about towing and so forth, while I go and see what has happened. Miss Monckton is — or perhaps was — to be my wife.”

I made no answer, thinking it better so; and in silence we went on board.

A grey-bearded captain came forward to meet us as we came up the *Valetta’s* side, the other officers were drawn up in a group to honour us; but Blake scarcely saw any of this, he rushed, rather than walked, through the crowd of passengers towards an old gentleman of military appearance, who was trying to force his way in our direction. I could not hear what was said, being too far away, but from their motions I could guess

that it was no good news; and presently, with bowed head my skipper followed the old general below.

The towing arrangements were soon seen to, but before they were finished, Blake came on



A, positions when sighted . B, beginning of action . C, positions at sunrise . D, torpedoing .

deck again with a white, set face, and silently taking his place in the dingy, we returned to the *Rattlesnake* without any reference to what had occurred on board the *Valetta*. Shortly afterwards, a hawser having been got out, we slowly made our way to Plymouth with the huge liner in our wake, reaching

that port without further adventure, save falling in with a couple of our own cruisers. These went on to look for the unfortunate crew of the *Davout*, some forty or more of whom were found crowded into our two boats or clinging to bits of deck-hamper, where they had been about twelve hours when rescued.

At Plymouth we parted company with the *Valetta*, which we left inside the breakwater. We ourselves were told to proceed at once to Portland, where a sort of floating dockyard had been set up for small repairs; the yards at Devonport and Keyham being already full to overflowing with ships fitting for sea or repairing after actions in which they had been engaged.

As soon as we had anchored inside Portland breakwater, Nature asserted herself, and we all fell asleep, leaving our ship in charge of a party from the *Blenheim*, who saw to our wounded; and the next morning we got alongside one of the dockyard steamers, whence a strong batch of carpenters and artificers came on board to put things to rights.

All things considered, we had suffered very slightly. Besides the doctor, we had only

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lost seven men killed; and thirteen were wounded, most of these but slightly. The tempest of fire under which we had charged had mostly passed over and around us; coming bow on, with the blazing sun behind us, we had made a very small and difficult target, if, indeed, the gunners were able to see us in the glare. Machine gun bullets had riddled our boats and top-hamper, but beyond the shell which killed the doctor, no big shot had hit us; and the holes where the machine gun fire had penetrated our sides at the moment when we swerved to discharge the torpedo, were not so very numerous. Blake's chain defence had done its work well.

We heard later, from the prisoners brought in by the cruisers, that the *Davout's* people fancied we were trying to either ram them or get rammed after the fashion set by Jowke; and they had prepared a warm reception for us, had we done so. It seemed that they also eased off a torpedo at us, but it either went under our bottom or missed altogether.

As for the *Valetta*, her history was a series of hairbreadth escapes from the day

she left Gibraltar. Chased by a French cruiser in the Bay of Biscay, she had made for the Atlantic and given her pursuer the slip; then, headed off by another, had been driven southward towards the Azores, where a lucky shot from one of the six-inch guns she carried on her poop had disabled this antagonist. Coaling at San Miguel, she struck homewards again, keeping well out in the Atlantic, for French cruisers swarmed like bees off the Spanish coast; and she had got along all right till our eventful meeting with her off the Scillies. The *Davout* had come up in the night from an opposite direction, still the *Valetta* was hoping to outsteam her; but the Frenchmen were within range and firing at her engines. The rest has been already told; save that some five of her crew and twelve passengers were killed, and nearly thirty wounded by the enemy's shells.

Miss Monckton's name appeared in the list of the slightly wounded, able to proceed to their homes; so we were at a loss to account for the state of mind the skipper was in. Whatever it was, he was a changed man; and though thoughtful of his crew as

ever, he now did his duty mechanically and wearily; his old enthusiasm, for the time at any rate, was lost.

"I suppose she's jilted him, poor beggar!" remarked Lawson, my fellow sub, as we went ashore that afternoon to see about some fresh provisions; and I was inclined to agree with him.

On the morrow we buried the doctor on shore: the service being read by a white-headed old clergyman, whose voice every now and again broke down in sobs; and by his side was a lady equally aged, who clutched his arm as he read the solemn words.

They were his father and mother, and it was thus that they buried their only son.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PRESS-GANG



THE dockyard people were working night and day at our ship, repairing the damage caused by the late action; but, slight as this comparatively speaking was, ten days' time was the earliest possible date by which they could promise her in. We were not allowed to be altogether idle in the interim, but were employed on a job that, however necessary it may have been, was distasteful to the last degree.

Ships were continually putting into Portland, to try and get a few men from the depôt which had been established on board the *Boscawen*; but the reserve had been exhausted some days before our arrival, and it was absolutely necessary to replenish the



supply. No volunteers being forthcoming, the admiral in command of the depôt ordered a press-gang on his own responsibility, knowing well that the Admiralty in its desperate strait would stand by him if he relieved their difficulty. On the rights and wrongs of the question I need scarcely speak,—certain newspapers have not dropped the subject even yet,—but behind the scenes we recognised that, if men would not volunteer to serve their country, they must be compelled to do so. All the same, none of us quite liked having to carry it out ourselves, and when it was done, would have given worlds to have had no share in it.

It was yet early in the morning that the semaphore came detailing us for the duty, and, glad of any excitement that would kill the memory of the recent fight, which had made me feel pretty queer when it was all over, I at first hailed the news with joy. As for the bluejackets, they were uproariously delighted at it—sailors hated the civil population pretty strongly just at that time. Blake was the only laggard when the news came, and he tried hard to get off; but it was no good—he had to go. From what transpired

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that night, I can well understand how he must have loathed visiting the district selected. The expedition, under the leadership of one Commander Kearson, consisted also of Lieutenant Blake, myself, and some threescore bluejackets and marines, mostly from our ship. The men all had their cutlasses, and we carried revolvers as well as our swords. A special train took us on our gruesome journey, landing us about a mile from the villages we intended to attack; and outside the station we separated, Kearson with one detachment moving off at once, while we hung about for a while, waiting till it should get dusk.

The church clock was striking nine as we strolled in small parties down the village street, halting at the inn where we expected to make our principal haul. To our astonishment, we found it deserted, save for a deaf old woman from whom we learned, after much questioning, that the best part of the population was gathered in the Parish Room, where a concert was being held to raise money for the widows of sailors killed in action. If our task had been unpleasant before, this information made it trebly so; but it had to be gone

through, nevertheless, and nothing was to be gained by delay.

Five minutes later we were all gathered outside the room. There were two doors to the place, one at the end, the other a small entrance leading to an anteroom as well. Blake and fifteen men made for the larger door, while I took the rest towards the other.

"When the song"—we could just catch the sound of a woman singing—"when the song is over, and they begin to applaud, rush in," whispered Blake to me, as we made for our respective posts.

The little door was ajar, and through it I could hear one of the sweetest voices it has ever been my lot to listen to, as it died away in that beautiful refrain—

"Be it ever so humble,  
There's no place like home."

Then came a storm of applause, and in the midst of it we burst through right on to the platform. Our sudden entrance caused a hush to fall on the audience, who rose to their feet and stared blankly, first at us and then at Blake's men, who had filed in at the other end of the room. It was Blake's voice that first broke the stillness.

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“I want twenty-four volunteers for Her Majesty’s fleet, and if these are not willing, it will be my duty to take two dozen of you, whether they will or no.” His speech was received in silence, and he repeated it without effect; though a youth or two near him seemed inclined to come forward, and then to think better of it.

“Very well,” cried Blake, anxious to get the business over as soon as possible, and he motioned to his followers to seize the most suitable-looking men.

Then indeed arose an awful uproar. I could not see what was going on down Blake’s end, as we were fully occupied in striving to capture and handcuff those near us, and at the same time ward off the blows that fell thick upon us from the captives’ fellow-villagers. A clergyman got up on the platform, and tried to say something, but his words were lost in the din of women shrieking and men cursing; then suddenly above this tumult I heard a woman’s voice calling to Blake by his Christian name.

Standing on the platform, facing my captain with flashing eyes, was the lady who had been singing when we so abruptly entered. She

seemed about to say something more, but an old gentleman, whom I recognised at once as General Monckton, intervened and led her to the anteroom ; and thither Blake soon made his way. I did not intentionally play the eavesdropper, but I couldn't help hearing what was said inside ; for I was posted close to the door, looking after our prisoners, who, surrounded by weeping women, were crowded into a corner hard by. The rest of the people had cleared out altogether, and comparative silence and some sort of order was restored.

"Lucy," Blake was saying, "fate seems to have ordained that I shall always appear to you as a brute or a murderer. Believe me that in neither case could I have acted otherwise. Why do you shun me and blame me, because my duty has compelled me to do what you have unfortunately been a witness of?"

She made no answer, or none that I could hear ; and he went on appealingly to her—  
"When we sank that cruiser which chased you in the *Valetta*, it was really and absolutely impossible for us to pick up her crew without endangering not our liberty only, but *your* lives and liberty as well. And as for what you have seen to-night, it had to be done,

and I had to do it, though God knows I find it hateful enough."

The old general seemed to have said something then, but I could not catch his words; and then at length Miss Monckton spoke.

"Edward, I loved you with all my heart, and I looked upon you as a prince among men. More, I love you still, though God knows I had rather not, for though I should live for ever, and though to live without you were endless torture, yet— Ah! go away, go away! I can never, *never* forget. That cry of the men you left to drown—the cries of the women here whose sons and sweethearts you have taken from them—the little children who will never see their fathers again!—Go! and may God forgive you, Edward, for the misery that you bring!"

I heard no more, much to my relief, for, all being ready, we now marched the prisoners away. Blake hurriedly joined us, and we started our tramp back to the station; but ere we had got well away from the village, a great crowd of rustics, armed with pitchforks, scythes, and other tools, came up, calling on us to give up our prisoners. There was a sharp scuffle, but the countrymen were no match for

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our sturdy sailors, who, their blood once roused, cut and slashed without mercy. A couple of burly fellows attacked me, one with a scythe cutting at my legs while his companion thrust at me with a fork, and though I made some sort of defence with my sword I was being pressed backwards and separated from our party, when a couple of flashes followed by two sharp reports came from behind me, and my assailants, throwing up their arms, stumbled into the roadway in a confused heap. Blake, who had fired the shots, seized my arm, drawing me after him, and we soon rejoined our fellows, who, having just charged the mob, were now left in peace. Two bluejackets had received nasty cuts, and most of us had some bruises; but on the whole we had got off lightly. One prisoner had escaped or been pulled away by his friends, but the others, attended by their women folk, were still in our keeping. By threats and force we got them along towards the station, though our progress was slow, and often interrupted by the women who clung about us, begging that we would spare them each her loved one. One old dame, whose grandson was among the captured, cursed us the whole journey;

and altogether we felt like a party of murderers.

At the station we found Commander Kearson and his men with a dozen prisoners handcuffed together in the centre of the group. The commander shut the women outside the station, and we got into the train unimpeded ; but long after we had left, the wails and lamentations of the crowd outside rang in our ears.

This was, I am happy to say, my first and last experience of a press-gang. Kearson, who had taken part in previous expeditions of the same sort, assured me that one soon got used to it ; but for my own part I had sooner be engaged in a slave raid. To make matters worse, after what I had seen, I was, of course, unable to talk the matter over with Blake ; and hanging about doing nothing at Portland was about the worst thing possible for me. My mind kept dwelling upon the gruesome scenes of that memorable night, and, inflamed by reading the violent articles that appeared about it,—for the press, with a few honourable exceptions, shrieked loudly about “The Press-Gang Outrages,”—I worked myself up into quite a fever of remorse.



As for Blake, he went and volunteered for any desperate service that might be on hand, and before long got one that soon relegated the press-gang incidents into the obscurity of the past.

## CHAPTER V

### A TORPEDO-BOAT ATTACK.

**B**OUVERIE," said Blake to me a few days later, "that press-gang business has regularly fixed you up. You need the 'blue pill of excitement,' as old Doctor Donerolly used to put it, so I've secured a nice little job for you."

"What's in the wind, now, sir?" I inquired. "I welcome anything to vary the monotony of hanging about idle in this infernal hole!"

"Well, you'll get it to-night in plenty, anyway," he replied, "as I've volunteered to lead a torpedo-boat attack, which ought to give us something to think about for a long while to come."

His words were prophetic enough, though in a way we little thought of then.

The projected attack was on Cherbourg. Two or three attacks had been made on this place, either from Portland or Alderney, but each had been a disastrous failure, and this in which we were about to take part was rather of the nature of a forlorn hope. It was designed more with a view to harassing the enemy than with any more definite and serious object, though of course we were not told that at the time.



TORPEDO-BOAT NO. 65.

There was the usual call for volunteers, and six boats were selected for the enterprise—the three "eighties" that the *Ratto* acted as division boat to, a couple of "seventies," and No. 65, which Blake took command of. This boat was the only survivor of the "C" flotilla, and the lieutenant who commanded her having been killed, and the sub sent ashore wounded, I took the latter's place.

"I don't mean to be destroyed by catchers if I can help it," said Blake, when we had all

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gathered in the stuffy little cabin to settle the plan of campaign. "All torpedoes, except those in the eighties, are to be set for four-foot depth only, so you'll be able to fire at catchers without sending your torpedoes under them; and don't fire till you're within a cable's length at the outside. Better not fire at all, than fire from too far away and miss. One torpedo got home, is worth a dozen wasted in the water, you know, so just all of you remember it. I shall be round shortly to see that everything is all right; there must be no bungling over to-night's business."

An hour or so later, Blake went round the boats, testing and inspecting everything, then, our preparations being complete, we steamed out through the "hole in the wall" and slowly along inshore.

"*Blenheim* will accompany you. No other British cruisers out," came a semaphore as we left; and presently in the growing dusk we made out the great cruiser coming up, keeping some two miles astern, and about the same distance to starboard of us. No. 65 leading, we kept along for some hours in single column of line ahead, going a good sixteen knots, and

leaving the cruiser farther and farther astern. The previous bad weather had abated, and the water was still and glassy, a dead black sheet, save for the phosphorescent gleams that licked our bow and shot across the little streaky waves we left in our wake. It was a dreamy, peaceful night, in strong contrast to the errand of death on which we were speeding; the sort of night that one involuntarily associates with peace and love, the sort of night that makes those at sea think gently of loved ones in the far away.

So thought I, as I reviewed in my mind a little romance of my own, wondering whether someone would, on my account, scan the morrow's papers with quickened pulse and bated breath, reading of how we had distinguished ourselves; or, perchance, dropping a tear if my name were in the list of those who would come back nevermore. Then insensibly my mind turned to Blake and *his* love affair, into which I had had such strange involuntary insights; and being in a curious mood, I began to vaguely query whether I should some time learn the end of it all. And even as I wondered, the man himself joined me where I sat on deck near the

standard compass, keeping an eye on the boats astern. Our nerves were strung to a high state of tension, and I remember, as though it were yesterday, how we held our hands over our pipes, lest perchance an enemy's cruiser should sight the glow. We had sat in silence some little time, when the skipper leaned over in my direction.

"Look here, Bouverie, old man," said he, "I mayn't come out of this job, and if I lose the number of my mess, and you don't, I'd like you to send the packet in my inside pocket to the address that's on it—and stay—you can do me another service too. You remember when we boarded the *Valetta* the other day, how I was knocked all of a heap. Miss Monckton—who, as I told you, was my *fiancée*—had been hit on the head by a bit of shell; but after they'd dressed it, she seemed all right, and came on deck again when the firing ceased; she was there when the *Davout* went down. The wound must have affected her brain in some way, however, or else that awful sight did, for she had to be taken below again quite delirious; and when her father led me to where she lay in a half faint, and told her I had come she roused

herself, shrieking that I was a murderer, and so on. After a while she got quite hysterical, and didn't even know me, so I did the wisest thing, and came away, and didn't see her again till that unfortunate episode last night. I suppose it's fate that I should appear to her as a cold-blooded butcher; but I want you, if I go under, to try and see her, to try and explain how I am not what fate has made me seem, and—you understand what it is I feel?—a fellow doesn't like to put it all into words."

I promised to do as he wished; and began making some ordinary enough remarks, to the effect that I hoped things would come all right, and so on, when I was interrupted by the look-out man near me calling in a sort of stage whisper—

"Warships on the starboard bow!"

Away to the southward, faintly discernible by night-glasses, were three vessels steaming slowly in station.

"Frenchmen!" cried Blake. "Man and arm ship."

I had no time to look about me for the next five minutes, but I could hear the whistles signalling to our flotilla, and presently

we altered station ; we were going to head off the enemy and sink him as he came up.

My tubes (I had the forward pair) being trained to starboard, I got a good view of the coming fight. The enemy had not seen us as yet, and, moving at slow speed, there was nothing to indicate our presence to them.

On they came ; three ships, each about four cables astern of the other ; the sternmost, larger than the rest, looked like a battleship or first class cruiser, and her Blake singled out as our special prey.

Our dispositions were quickly made ; we intended to wait in two columns ahead of them till they should come up between us, unless they should spot us and open fire before, in which case our whole flotilla would attack, and trust to luck.

When the ships were yet a mile or so away, they sighted the *Blenheim*, and made some signals in her direction, whereupon she immediately put on full speed towards them, signalling as she went.

“Cute of the *Blenheim* to occupy their attention,” said Blake.

“Wants to get a look in too, sir,” called



out a sub from one of the eighties. "Let's go at them now, sir."

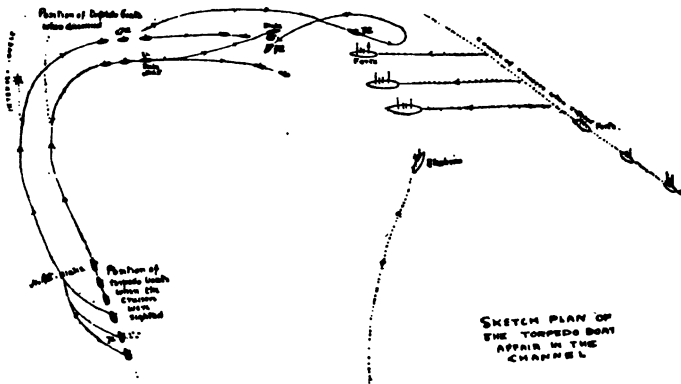
He had hardly ceased speaking when the leading cruiser burst into flame; a torrent of shot whistled over our heads; and at the same moment No. 72, which was commanded by a sub named Dewarne, who was more than anxious to distinguish himself, started off at them full speed without waiting for any orders. The next ship now began to fire as well, and off we all went in their direction; but a detour was necessary, as our quarry, instead of waiting to be attacked, came slap bang at us. We had hardly started, however, before we saw the *Blenheim* close to them, sending up rockets and signalling, and presently they ceased to fire.

"By God! they are *our own cruisers!*" shouted Blake, and we made as hard as we could pelt after young Dewarne, whistling and flashing to him to come back; but it was too late. A great dimly-white column shot up from the bow of the leading cruiser, followed by the sullen boom of an exploding torpedo, and then we came within hail of Dewarne's boat, returning to see what damage she had inflicted.

"I guess this means promotion, sir!" he sang out to Blake as we passed each other.

"Promotion? You cursed young fool, you've blown up one of our own ships! Come and see what mischief you have done!"

Our men came tumbling up from below, whither they had been sent to lie down under



as much cover as they could find; and we got the dingy ready to launch.

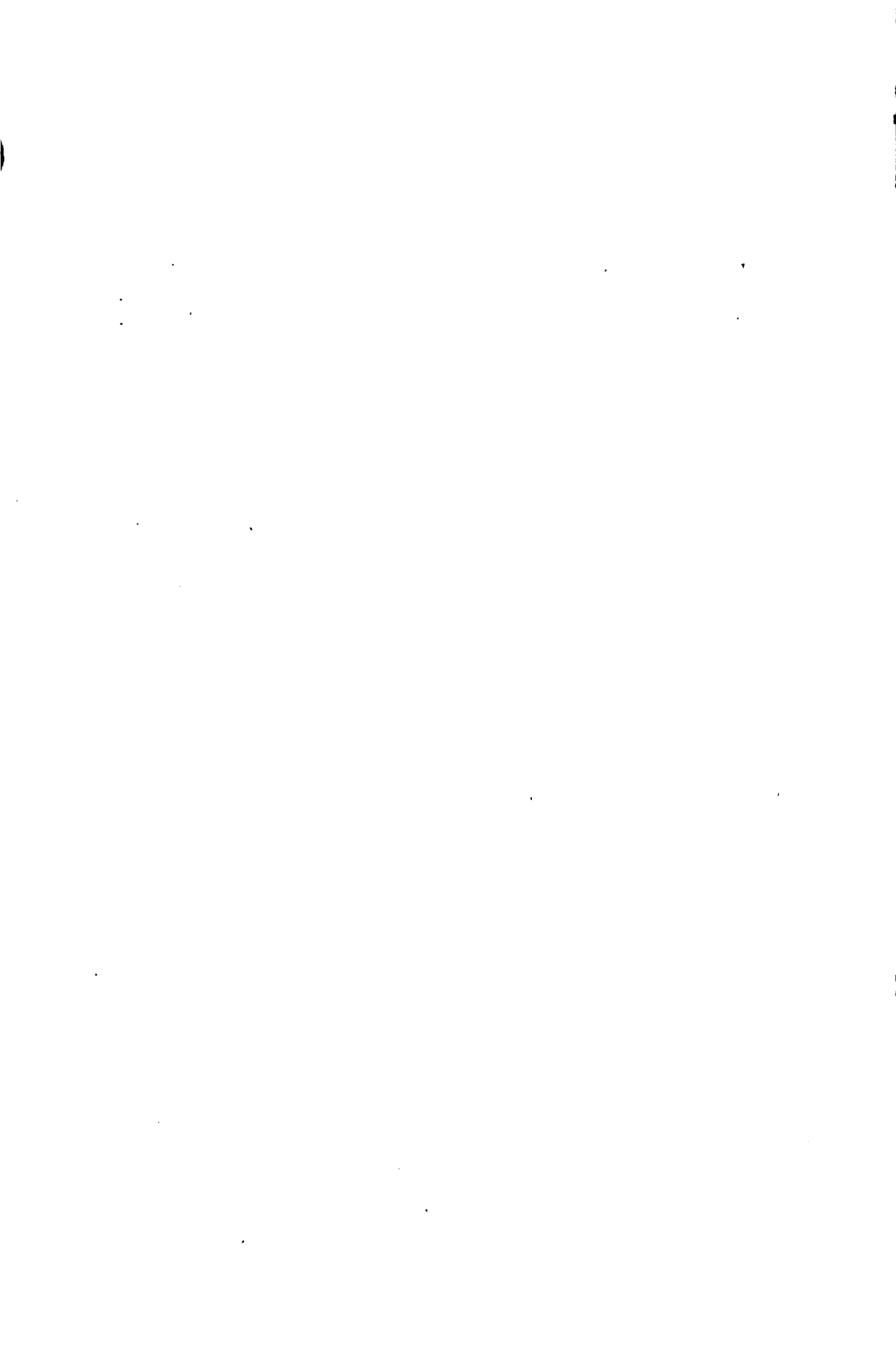
It is one thing to destroy an enemy, another to see one's own countrymen struggling for life. The cruiser—she turned out to be the *Forte*—was settling down at the bow, and we could see her crew getting out the boats in great haste. The *Blenheim* and

other ships were soon near the spot, playing their search-lights on the wreck, while all of them were sending boats, and we were in hopes of getting all the crew safe away, when suddenly and without warning the *Forte* plunged under, carrying with her many of the ships' boats, and also No. 85, which had been badly damaged in the attack. Dewarne, who up to this moment had been standing by his quartermaster, staring like a dazed man at the wreck, suddenly threw up his arms, and with an awful shriek plunged into the sea—and we saw him no more. Poor boy, he and many a brave sailor had been sacrificed to a signalman's blunder—our half-trained and overworked signalman had mis-read that last semaphore about ships in the Channel as we left Portland.<sup>1</sup> Signalmen, like everything else, could not be made in a day out of the raw material supplied to the fleet. This sort of mistake we had most of us met with in manœuvres, but then everybody considered it a good joke, but now——

<sup>1</sup> The signal really made was—"All ships out, in groups of three at four cables; will show green light before firing on torpedo-boats." The Admiralty, with a view to avoiding disasters of this sort, had made elaborate arrangements similar to the above.



SACRIFICED TO A SIGNALMAN'S BLUNDER.



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The senior captain, after consultations with the others, decided to go on with the attack on the French; so, after half an hour's delay, we started off again. From Portland to Cherbourg is roughly about 75 miles; steaming at an average of 16 knots an hour, and allowing for the delay caused by the sinking of the *Forte*, we expected to be off the place about 2.30 A.M.

Leaving the cruisers behind for a rallying point, our five remaining boats steamed on. Some boats from Alderney—which was very closely watched by the French—were supposed to make a feint to attract the attention of the catchers guarding Cherbourg; but of this attack we neither saw nor heard anything.

After an hour's steaming, Blake reckoned that we were off the place, so we reduced speed; but nothing was visible. Then, all of a sudden, two black objects, rapidly increasing in size, appeared in the water ahead; a moment later we were bathed in the blinding glare of search-lights. We scattered to try and avoid the rays; they could not succeed in keeping all of us under observation, and our boat managed to do this. Blake was steering the boat himself,—standing on deck,

as it was impossible to work her properly from the conning tower,—and he and the warrant officer, Mr. Hacker, who had the after torpedo tubes, were the only persons on deck besides myself.

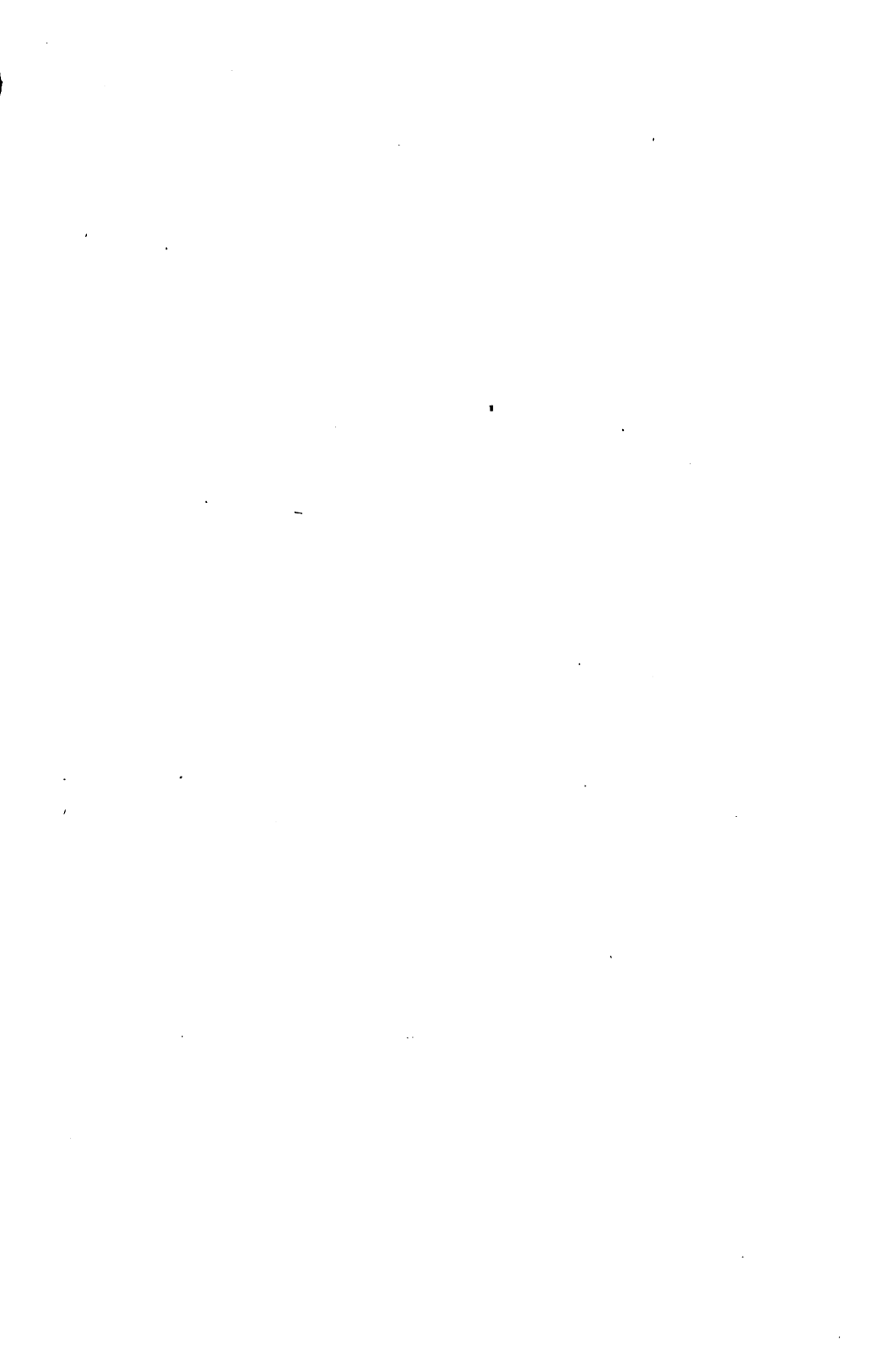
In less time than it takes to write, one of the destroyers was abreast of us, and as she passed I fired the port torpedo, which was set for four feet only. A regular tempest of shot hailed round about us at the same moment, and I saw Mr. Hacker fall back from his tubes and slide through the railings into the water. The skipper I could not see, but, on running aft, I found him all of a heap on the deck, though still grasping the steering-wheel. Taking the gunner's place, I waited till we passed the other destroyer, which got her search-light on us at that instant. I believe I discharged the torpedo; then the whole thing collapsed, and I was left in darkness, while far astern I could make out the catcher still unhurt, with her light on No. 74, and that was the last seen of that boat; but another of ours must have come up and torpedoed the enemy, for she disappeared, though in the noise and racket of firing I did not notice any explosion.



I FOUND HIM ALL OF A HEAP ON THE DECK, THOUGH STILL GRASPING  
THE STEERING-WHEEL.

*Page 108.*





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Blake still lay at the steering-wheel, amid the shattered remnants of the after conning-tower; and from the engine hatch came a cloud of scalding white steam, so that passage forward was now impossible. I sang out to the men in the bow, and after several attempts heard an answering hail; then, going below to the wardroom, yelled through the voice-tube to the engine-room, but there was no response. Getting on deck again, I sighted one of the "eighty" boats steaming slowly towards us, in little better plight than ourselves. Her skipper tried to get us in tow, I believe; but it would have fared ill with both of us had not one of our cruisers come up just in the nick of time—for the men forward now cried out that we were sinking. The skipper of the "eighty" boat, who had made one or two ineffectual efforts to come alongside, sang out to us to be ready for a boat that was coming from the cruiser; and I now remembered our poor skipper, whom I had forgotten in the perplexities of the situation. I raised him to see if he yet lived, but he lay as a dead weight in my arms, and his coat was soaked with blood. I held him thus till the *Andromache's* boat, which had taken off the blue-

jackets forward, came round to our stern, and two of her crew jumping on board us, carried the skipper into the stern-sheets, while I hastily scrambled after them, fainting away almost as soon as I had done so.

I can just remember waking as we reached the cruiser, and seeing lanterns held over the side as our skipper was hoisted up over, but when I took the man-ropes my strength failed me, and I had to be taken over the side in the same fashion as Blake.

A couple of days later the *Andromache* put into Portsmouth, and we—that is, Blake and I—were sent to Haslar Hospital, which was full of wounded men; as also were all Miss Weston's Homes. Blake had fainted from loss of blood, having been wounded in the left arm by a bullet, while a fragment of shell had hit his back. They put me in a cot alongside the skipper, for though I had received no actual wound, the torpedo tube, when the shock knocked it round, had bruised and crushed me all over; and we made a sorry pair.

My mother came to see me here. Poor little mother! all her three sons had gone to serve Queen and country, and one lay

wounded at Haslar, while another slept beneath the ocean. My surviving brother was a lieutenant in the Blue Marines, and hitherto fate had spared him. I shall tell his story later.

There were a great many nurses about the ward, many evidently lady volunteers, who, with gentle, sympathetic touch and soothing voice, did much to calm and allay the suffering around them. There were occasional visitors too, and dimly I remember seeing, in my half-delirium, a tall and stately woman bending over the unconscious Blake. She seemed to be always watching him, till I began to wonder whether after all she was aught but a creation of my fevered brain. I was one day idly staring at her thus, half envious of Blake; when, seeing my gaze fixed upon them, she came towards me and spoke—

“You are one of Lieutenant Blake’s officers, are you not?”


“Then,” she went on, as I assented, “will you do us both a favour? Never tell him what you have seen. Promise!”

I promised, and I kept my word. Next day Blake had recovered consciousness, but

his strange visitor had disappeared altogether, and to this day I cannot be sure who she was—whether she was Miss Monckton or another, or even whether the whole scene were aught but an invalid's hallucination.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BOMBARDMENT

HILE I was getting convalescent in this little paradise, the war was working its course, but into most of the details of events in which I had no part I do not propose to enter. Abler pens than mine have done justice to these great battles already, and this is merely a little story of the war as it seemed to a junior officer little conversant with its main issues.

It was while I lay at Haslar that news came of the great fight off Toulon, in which, after a conflict of desperate valour, both sides lay by, unable to do any more injury to each other; and of how the Russians, breaking through the Dardanelles to take the British fleet in the rear, fell a prey to the second class torpedo-boats of the *Vulcan*; and of all

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the other momentous events of those three days, in which nearly all the belligerent vessels disappeared from the Mediterranean, having mutually destroyed each other. Almost simultaneously came the news of the Cronstadt disaster, a disaster that sounded the first note of the downfall of the Empire.

My marine brother, in the *Northampton*, sent me a letter describing this event, which I may be pardoned for quoting here. The first part, as may be seen, was written before the catastrophe:—

"MY DEAR BROTHER," he wrote, "I've been a long time in replying to your last, but have been hoping to have some news to send, and hitherto things have been dull as ditch-water with us. But *nous avons change tout cela*, as the new admiral is going to bombard Cronstadt to-morrow, and God help us in this old packet! However, I won't croak, but will send you a flowing description of it when it's over—that is, if I get through, which is open to doubt, I'm afraid.

"We've a jolly ship's company, though most of them are old stagers; old Punchy—whom you doubtless remember—is our com-

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mander, and a regular zealot he is. He didn't expect to get his promotion; and having got it after all, is as proud as his namesake, and spends all his time over spit and polish and having the ship painted. Odin—as we call the skipper—is bitten that way too, so between them we're about the smartest-looking ship out here; though that's about as far as it goes, as our crew are a miserable set all told. Our fellows are only passable, while there aren't twenty decent bluejackets, all the rest are raw landlubber recruits; and I'm told that the stokers are if anything worse, since Odin has managed to lick the sailor recruits into some sort of shape—though it exhausted his vocabulary to do it.

“We have the inevitable war-correspondent on board; and as he has never been to sea before in his life, you may guess we get some fun out of him. All his previous existence seems to have been spent in the House of Commons Press Gallery, so we younger fellows pull his leg no end, though my conscience pricks me now and then, as he's a good sort at bottom, and takes it all very well. Our young doctor supplies all the technical parts of his letters home,—or he and the A. P.



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between them do,—so you may guess the sort of stuff that goes to his paper. I don't think our young Sawbones knows the *Royal Oak* from a torpedo-boat, but somehow or other, correspondents without technical knowledge always go to these fellows. I fancy he twigged at last that their information was a bit unreliable, for after a bit he tried to tap me, and that's what started the leg-pulling; for, 'pon my word, I'm not exactly A1 in naval matters, though I'm pretty fair in gunnery. I hear they've got a correspondent in the *Royal Oak* who writes a couple of learned works on the Navy every year; and he, when last heard of, had been trying to teach the admiral how to capture Cronstadt—offered to take command for him, some fellows say; but his dodge was a cute one all the same, still—

“I have the two after 10-inch guns—same sort as you had in the poor old *Nelson*; but how we're going to fight these muzzle-loading old popguns is beyond me altogether; still, we've got to try, somehow.

“You'd hardly think from this yarn that we're going into action to-morrow at daybreak; but it's best to try and keep one's pecker up,

and I prefer not to think of what's got to be gone through between now and this time to-morrow.

“Well, good-bye, old fellow, if this should chance to be my last letter. I've got to write to the Mater yet; it's already gone four bells, so lights out will be round if I don't hurry up.”

The other part of the letter was dated some days later :—

“ . . . I've not been able to write before, old man, because after the bombardment, of which you'll have heard ere this, I've had too much to do helping the doctors, and so on. I believe our fleet is altogether knocked out of time—the poor old *Northo'* is, any way. It makes me sick to think of the fight even now; I don't think I'll ever get the taste of it out of my mouth. We got in at daybreak, and opened fire at about 4000 yards on a big fort; but our guns aren't much good at that distance even, so Odin edged in nearer, till we got within 2000.

“It was a curious sensation laying the rear port 10-inch. I did it myself, to make sure of a good shot, and I think it got home; but, the port being closed directly we fired, I can't

say for certain. There were splashes in the water all around us, but the Russians hadn't got the range then, and it just gave us time to get cool behind the armoured bulkhead. I don't know how the poor devils amidships can have felt, with only a sheet of thin iron between them and the enemy; and, to make matters worse, they hadn't got the wire screens which should go between the 9-inch guns to localise shell-fire—these were left behind at Chatham, of course. We might have been able to make some sort of shift with the torpedo-nets, but they were out and down; and a good thing that they were, too, for we had at least three torpedoes explode in them.

"It seems very tame and prosy as I write this and think of what the real affair was—it's little more exciting than our log, which says—in your regular executive style—

"'Bombarded Cronstadt. Opened fire 6 A.M. at 4000 yds. to 2000 yds. range. Received heavy fire about 6.30. Had to haul out of action at 6.45. Battery totally disabled, and greater part of crew killed or wounded.'

"This is all correct enough, but bald. Well, as I was saying, the shot kept on missing us, and we were getting quite chirpy,

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when there came a couple of violent explosions from the battery amidships. The whole place was filled with an infernal suffocating stink, and I just caught a glimpse through the smoke of a gun falling over and everything smashed to smithereens. We were just about to fire our starboard gun (for the ship was shifting stern on to the shore batteries), when it ran back on its stand and toppled over, crushing three men beneath it and sending the rest helter-skelter. I was upset by them, but was soon on my legs again and over to the other gun, which we eased off directly we got a sight.

“I looked round at the battery amidships. There was a great hole in the deck, with dead and wounded men lying all around it; and even as I looked, there came a swish, swish, swish, and an awful tearing sound. The ship’s turning had exposed the main deck to the forts, which had now got our range with small Q. F. and machine guns, and the poor devils amidships were going down like ninepins. Of those left alive, some were rushing wildly up and down screaming for mercy, driven clean mad—others were jumping out of the ports into the sea. It was all over in a few seconds; but by the time the ship had got round again,

with the fore bulkhead against the enemy's fire, there wasn't a single man left standing at our eight unprotected guns. My God! it was an awful thing to look upon—an awful thing.

"There was a lull now for a few minutes; as neither of our bow guns were firing, and overhead the Hotchkiss guns had ceased. They began again for a minute or so, then as suddenly stopped; and nothing was to be heard save the groaning of the wounded, the roar of battle outside, and the occasional thud of a shot striking the bulkhead, which made the old *Northo'* tremble from head to stern. Two or three times there came more violent shocks still, and we were all thrown off our feet, while the ship lurched as though she were foundering. I suppose we must have gone on working our gun, but I can't remember anything definite till I saw the captain coming down the companion by the ship's bell. He was badly wounded, but in voice and bearing kept the same as ever.

"'Hum, Mr. Bouverie! you'll be glad to hear we're to keep out of this—why, damme, it's worse here than on deck!' He spoke as though nothing very unusual had happened, and it pulled me together.





A CRUISER HAD TOWED US OUT OF DANGER, FOR THE SHIP . . . COULD NEITHER STEER NOR STEAM.

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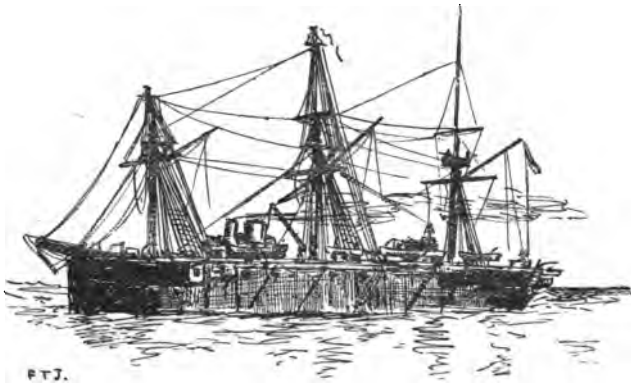
“I found then that we were out of range, and had been for some time; a cruiser had towed us out of danger, for the ship, being pretty well blown inside out, could neither steer nor steam. Of the 550 who made our crew in the morning, only about 130—mostly stokers—answered to the muster-roll; and of these less than forty are unhurt. I am one of them, I’m thankful to say. It seems Odin had the stokers up to man the Q. F. guns, because all the bluejackets at them were killed.

“D’Arcy, my captain, is still alive, but very seriously wounded, and the skipper and commander are still on their legs; all the other executives are down. Our newspaper man, the purser, and the padré have all lost the number of their mess—killed while trying to take a wounded man below. Our armour has been pierced in several places, but on the whole has kept shot out well, as it is dented all over where they’ve hit it and rebounded or glanced off.

“We have lost the *Royal Oak*, *Aurora*, *Monarch*, and *Téméraire*, while the other ships are so knocked about that, had the Russian ironclads come out, they’d have sunk



the lot of us. Luckily, providentially, they didn't—afraid of our torpedo-boats, they let us draw off; but this licking will do us no end of harm. The *Northampton* is ordered home; I hope she won't sink by the way. A fresh fleet has just met us—not before they



H.M.S. "NORTHAMPTON."

were wanted—their news would, however, be stale to you. I hope this coal strike scare hasn't got any truth in it—we have had the most alarming rumours of it.—Chin chin, old chap. Your affectionate brother,

"CHARLES BOUVERIE.

"P.S.—Have you heard that the *Royal Oak* was sunk by a dynamite gun?"

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The coal strike, to which my brother alluded, is all too well known in England. Everyone remembers this repetition on a gigantic scale of the coal strike of 1893; how it spread all over Europe, and was started to show the brotherhood of workers; how, while they shot them down or made them work abroad, the British Government let things be till the coal reserves were exhausted and our fleets well-nigh idle. Everyone, too, knows the panic that came about when the admiral in the Baltic sent telegram after telegram saying that his fleet was laid up useless in the Abö archipelago for want of fuel; and how, when it was too late, troops were sent to end the strike and compel the men to work.

Fewer people are aware how our Baltic squadron got such coal as it had. Cute Yankees sent over colliers flying French or Russian flags; there was a nominal capture by British ships; and the coal changed hands for about its weight in gold.

Blake and I were reported fit for duty on the same day. He had got his extra stripe for sinking the *Davout*, which was made a deal of in the papers; he got a destroyer as his new ship, and he did me the honour of

fixing things at the A. so that I came as his sub—for I had got that amount of promotion over the *Davout* business.

I have omitted to state that while we were on the sick-list, our poor old *Ratto* went down with colours flying off the French coast; a cruiser settled her hash. The Admiralty had



THE NEW " RATTLESNAKE. "

just started that very wise plan of re-naming new ships after such vessels as had gone down after rendering themselves famous in the war. Truly Blake's new ship, one of the latest destroyers, was better with her new name of *Rattlesnake* than under her old one of *Snarler* or *Jellyfish*—I forget now which of these names was her original one.

The new *Ratto* was 250 feet long, carried

four torpedo tubes amidships, one 12-pounder Q. F., and five 3-pounder Q. F. guns, and could make about thirty knots an hour speed. Unlike the majority of the destroyers, she belonged to the *Vernon* instead of to the *Excellent* fellows; and so was practically put into commission as a large independent sea-going torpedo-boat; the Admiralty having soon found out that a certain number of officers acting more or less on their own fancy could do a tremendous amount of damage to the enemy.

Our complement was fifty, five above the allotted number, and besides Blake and myself we carried an acting sub, who, poor beggar, was too seasick most of the time to be of much service except when there was any fighting on; he was then as a fiend incarnate—death was a far easier foe to face than sea-sickness. On the whole we did fairly well in the *Ratto*, her size made her a far better sea-boat than the earlier *Havock* and *Boxer* types; and we had things pretty much our own way, Blake having had the luck or influence to get a seasoned crew. Many of the destroyers, manned by half-raw seamen, were as good as useless in the bad weather then prevailing—


weather which kept nearly all the hostile small craft in port. We, of course, couldn't keep the sea for more than a few days on end, still it was a thing to get out at all.

We were ordered to the Baltic with some cruisers, both to reinforce the fleet there, and to help accompany and protect a large fleet of colliers, which had been filled the moment the coal strike ended.

Before we left Portsmouth, however, a meeting took place on board the torpedo depôt ship *Vernon*, which, though not very lengthy or largely attended, was destined to alter the history of the world.

## CHAPTER VII

### ON CONVOY DUTY

ELL, you fellows clearly understand what it is that I advocate, and what responsibility it will throw upon us. It's a foregone conclusion, I take it, that our fleet in the Baltic is bound to get licked; because the Russians, if they've got any 'savvy' at all, will attack before the colliers reach our ships; and then, having polished us off in their own waters, the Channel fleet will, without any difficulty, be demolished or shut up in harbour by them when they have combined with the French."

"Let us have your plan in full, Blake? You've only given a very rough outline as yet," said someone.

"By all means. I intend doing it myself, with or without assistance, and to back it

from my private purse. Not that I think England deserves it; since, when the Admiralty wanted to send the Channel fleet to combine with Moirseaye, and dish up the French at Toulon, the whole country, fearing invasion, rose against them and prevented it, with the result that our Mediterranean fleet is now practically non-existent."

"You might add, too," put in Lieutenant Berkeley, "look at the contents bills of the evening papers. They put what interests their public most—horse races and the labour question. Patriotism has become —*x*", and the English, as a nation, don't care a hang for their country so long as their own dirty skins are comfortable. However, excuse the interruption, and go on with your plan, Blake."

"Well," continued our skipper, "you may remember—if your classical history, Berkeley, is equal to your algebra—that Athens lost her whole navy at Aegospotami, save a few ships that one Conon had the sense to save, and use later on his own hook. I propose following his programme in the event of things turning out as badly as we anticipate. Directly the Russians polish off our Baltic fleet and get through the Sound, I am going to bolt for the

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Scotch coast. Lamlash will, I think, be the best harbour, because I know that channel well; and being on an island, we can cut the telegraph wires so that no intelligence reaches the English newspapers, and through them, the enemy. There we can concentrate at leisure, mature our plans, and fall on the enemy with torpedoes as soon as he has command of the English Channel and begins to invade. I've worked out most of the details, but these can be discussed later. What I want to know is—how many of you fellows will join in the enterprise?"

"I'm with you for one."

"Put me down."

"Me too. I'd sooner go down making a fight for it, than be sunk trying to bolt."

Similar cries resounded through the *Vernon's* smoking-room, and we all cheered in our enthusiasm at the idea of a campaign carried out entirely by torpedo men. When the noise had subsided a bit, Commander Wrexham rose from the chair in which he had been lolling.

"I'm not one for speeches and palavering, and all I want to say is this. We need a senior officer to boss the show, and I'm senior to the rest of you; but I think Blake is the



better man for the job, and the idea belongs to him alone, so I propose that we elect him commodore of the Lamdash torpedo fleet."

Everyone present rose to second the proposal; and thus it came about that everything was arranged against Britain's expected collapse.

"Mind," said Blake, as he acknowledged his unorthodox promotion, "beyond all else it is necessary that this be kept quiet. It means deserting at a moment when our services would be most useful to protect any battle-ships that may escape the general disaster; and neither the Admiralty nor anyone else will be likely to sanction that. But it also means that, instead of being practically useless and destroyed piecemeal, we shall bag the best part of the hostile fleets soon afterwards. It is a grave step, but I think that we shall do our duty best by so doing."

"And get court-martialled for not having gone down without accomplishing anything," put in the cynical Berkeley; "but I'm with you all the same."

After some of the principal details had been settled, the meeting broke up; and the next day the *Rattlesnake* sailed for the Baltic, in company with three cruisers and some colliers.

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Expectation was rife as to whether we should encounter any hostile vessels, but we reached Sheerness—where we filled up with coal, and picked up another destroyer and some more colliers—without sighting a single warship, other than cruisers of our own side in the Downs.

“That’s all very well,” Blake was saying, “but we haven’t entered the wood yet. ’Tisn’t likely we’d come across Frenchmen in the chops of the Channel—as well look for them in the Serpentine. The Channel just now is an English lake. If you want to see what’s going to happen, just wait till we’ve left the Nore and the Mouse behind us.”

We were dining at the Sheerness Gunnery School, where a few old stagers—retired goodness knows how many years—and a sprinkling of convalescent combatants, held solemn court. Everybody originally belonging to the place had been sent away long ago. Its present occupants, though most of them had volunteered for active service, were verily the halt, the maimed, and the blind. The senior of them all, an old W. O., retired as a lieutenant,

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was popularly reported to have served under Nelson at Trafalgar ; while the junior, a peer of the realm who had quitted the service when yet a midshipman,—and was said to be now serving in that capacity,—was well over sixty years old. All of them were gouty, rheumatic, or wanting in legs and arms ; but all of them spent the day in cursing the Admiralty for sending them there instead of afloat. Poor old boys, they were useful enough at Sheerness in those busy days, and had the civilians of England had a tenth of their patriotism, things would have gone very differently to the way in which they did. As for the convalescents—well, they could crawl, and that was about all—it was a shame to employ them so soon, but it was a case of “ needs must when the devil drives ” with those who sent them there. For that matter, there were plenty of wounded heroes afloat with the fleets, who just got up to take their watches and then had to go to bed till duty called them to their legs again. It sounds almost improbable now, but what was to be done ? None complained ; duty called them to fight for England as long as they had a leg to stand on, and they did it uncomplainingly. They

died in the end, every one of them; only the very strongest tonics the doctors could give kept them going at all. Ah well, it's over now, and they are all forgotten, these unknown heroes of the war.

Our dinner with the Sheerness veterans was a cheerful enough affair in its way. They were all anxious to bid us God-speed for the morrow, and everybody was pretty chirpy, except Blake, who of late had taken to croaking a good deal. The skipper of the other destroyer, who had been at the *Vernon* meeting, put it down in private to our skipper's fear lest the defeat of the British fleet—the essential preliminary to Blake's scheme—should not come off. Now he intervened to stop Blake's prognostications, charging him that all those things, being inevitable, must wait till the morrow.

“All right!” Blake answered; “fire away about something else.”

“That's it,” said one of the veterans. “Here we've asked Major Brown over to give you fellows a true and faithful report of the target practice of the newly enrolled Shouter Gun Fencibles, and you won't give him a chance to tell it.”

"Well, we're all attention now. The name of the corps sounds interesting."

"You must know," said the major, who was a ponderous sort of humorist, and belonged to the gunners, "you must know that the garrison here has been so depleted, thanks to men needed to help man ships and for foreign service, that we've only a couple of hundred regulars here all told. The rest are militia and London volunteers, infantry mostly, but that's a detail in these days.

"Well, getting to hear of this, the *Shouter*—one of these newspapers started since the war began—conceived the brilliant idea of raising a subscription force for the defence of Sheerness; and we've got them with us now. A special correspondent chronicles their daily doings: what they eat, what they drink, what they say, how brave they feel, and all the rest of it, not forgetting to mention the unfortunate and unreasonable jealousy with which they are regarded by the conventional garrison."

"'Conventional garrison' is good," said some one. "Well, how do they get on?"

"Get on?" repeated the major. "Well, I wish they had joined the enemy instead;

they'd have been a real help to us then. You see, they are all cockneys, with votes, and the Government just now will do any mortal thing to catch votes, and with a view of getting the few thousand votes of these fellows, it has given them the new fort outside the dockyard—the one where the couple of 9-inch guns used to be. The *Shouter*, of course, published full plans and details of the fort, all the distances, and so forth, so the enemy, if they come, will know exactly how to destroy the thing—though maybe that'll be a blessing in disguise; as, 'pon my soul, I fancy the first thing the 'Shouters' would do in a bombardment by ships coming up the river, would be to drop shells into us out Milton way, under the impression that we were a hostile turret-ship."

"Well, you have our sympathies, major," said Blake, when the laugh had died away; "but, no offence, you know, I'm afraid I'm a bitter opponent of your forts altogether. The money that they cost would have been far better spent on half a dozen ships at sea."

"It's rank heresy of me to say so," the major answered, "but, *sub rosa*, I'm getting to be of your opinion. I don't know, of course, that I'd go so far as you, and advocate

no forts at a place like this ; but, as a general rule, I'm coming round to the belief that the enemies' shores are our boundaries, and not the coast of England."

"Where are the shores of England?  
They're every hostile coast,"

sang some one farther down the table.

A signalman came in at this moment, interrupting the songster. "Signal for officers of the fleet," he read.

*"All officers to repair on board immediately; convoy to put to sea without delay."*

Our dinner-party was hastily broken up. Instead of waiting at Sheerness for some cruisers from Chatham, we were to be off then and there ; and a couple of hours later we were under way.

It was a big job getting the colliers started, but it was done at last, and out we all went. The escort was small—too small, in fact, but no more ships were available. Some miles ahead of the convoy the *Decoy*—the other destroyer—scouted ; then came the *Edgar*, heading the collier fleet, which was disposed in two columns of line ahead, eight vessels in each column. Astern of these again were some "tramps" running cargoes to Danish

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and Swedish ports. On either beam a second class cruiser scouted ; while our duties, the most onerous of the lot, consisted in steaming swiftly up and down between the columns, doing what we could to keep the merchant vessels in station. We also had to scout astern, so, altogether, were pretty hard-worked.

We passed the forts manned by the *Shouter* corps safely, and when morning broke, were steaming along at eight knots, in terribly irregular order, but the merchantmen, thanks to our exertions, were all in sight. This was a comfort, as Blake had prophesied we should lose about two a night, and I was quite astonished, on counting them, to find that none were missing.

About eleven o'clock we met with our first adventure : the *Decoy* came tearing back, signalling that strange cruisers were ahead.

“Frenchmen, I'll be bound !” exclaimed Blake ; “and that's why everything's been so quiet of late in the Atlantic. Depend upon it, these fellows have been round the North of Scotland, while our ships have been looking out for them in the Channel. They got hold of English newspapers, and learnt the exact disposition of our convoy, date of sailing, and



all the rest of it; and now they're going to scoop us all."

As it afterwards turned out, Blake's surmise was pretty accurate. The French cruisers had managed to slip round our coasts into the North Sea, and one of them lying in a Danish port received telegraphic information from France as to what time we should sail. It was possibly a suspicion of this sort of thing that brought about the sudden change in our time of sailing, but the French were one too many for us.

The convoy came to a standstill ; the *Edgar* and the second class cruisers steamed quickly away ahead, leaving the *Rattlesnake* in charge. They were soon hull down on the horizon, and we waited in wondering suspense, till towards evening, when back they came again. They had found nothing ahead, and shortly afterwards, altering course a few points to the northward, our convoy proceeded at the increased speed of ten knots, which was the utmost many of our flock could manage. Huge columns of black smoke rose from their funnels, leaving great banks of darkness astern ; an indication of our whereabouts, visible for miles and miles.

The night fell; fortunately for us, it was a fairly light one, with occasional bursts of moonlight through the fleecy clouds that flecked the sky.

“We shall have something happen in ‘the middle’ to-night, I guess,” said Blake, as he came up from dinner; “we’ll all be wanted for that watch.”

The captain of the *Edgar* seemed to be of a kindred opinion, and we were kept tearing up and down the lines in strenuous attempts to keep the colliers in some sort of station.

About midnight, when the moon was near to setting, we had just made one of our innumerable patrols down the columns, which, despite all our efforts, were now fully ten miles long. We counted them as we steamed past—they were all there, thirty-two vessels including “the tramps.”

“I say, sir,” said Thorne, as we passed the last of these tramps, “what do you make of that packet?”

He pointed to a large two-funnelled steamer, that was going along under easy steam apparently, notwithstanding that she should, by rights, have been going her hardest.

Blake and I both had a good look at the

ship, then the skipper asked Thorne what puzzled him about her.

"Only this, sir; that I could swear that last time we came down the lines, all the lame ducks and stragglers were single-funnelled craft."

"And you think this is a French cruiser disguised, who's taken the place of a very laggard tramp while we were ahead?"

"Precisely so, sir."

"Well, we'd soon make certain by asking a few questions, besides telling her to make her number, but that might be a bit precipitate," remarked Blake. "She'd blow us out of the water before we could get a shot in, so we'll just watch her for a while. I don't think she'll try any larks till she can slip up to the middle of the lines."

We steamed on, and presently, watching the mysterious ship from a distance, we saw her put on speed, and get ahead of a few of the tramps.

"That settles it, I think," Blake exclaimed. "Full speed ahead! Man and arm ship—quietly, mind."

I gave the necessary orders, and we were soon ready for what might befall. All this

time the *Ratto* had been rushing towards the *Apollo*, to whom we signalled our suspicions; then we went back again at our best speed, the *Apollo* following at a more leisurely rate.

As we had expected, the supposed enemy had again shifted her billet, and was now astern of the colliers, which still kept some sort of station.

"Ready with torpedo tubes," ordered Blake. "Here, I'll see to it myself over this job. Steam to within a couple of cables, Bouverie, —it's a longish distance, but we must risk it; and tell those fellows at the 12-pounder to keep out of sight." Then he lay along the tubes, his finger on the trigger, while I carried out his orders.

In a few minutes we were within the prescribed range, and Blake called to me to steam with the stranger, keeping that space between us.

"Tell her to make her number, signalman," we heard him say to the man who stood near him.

I heard the clicking of the lantern, then came a pause. There was no answering signal, but I fancied I could hear a bustle on board

the steamer—the sound of men moving and of gun ports being opened.

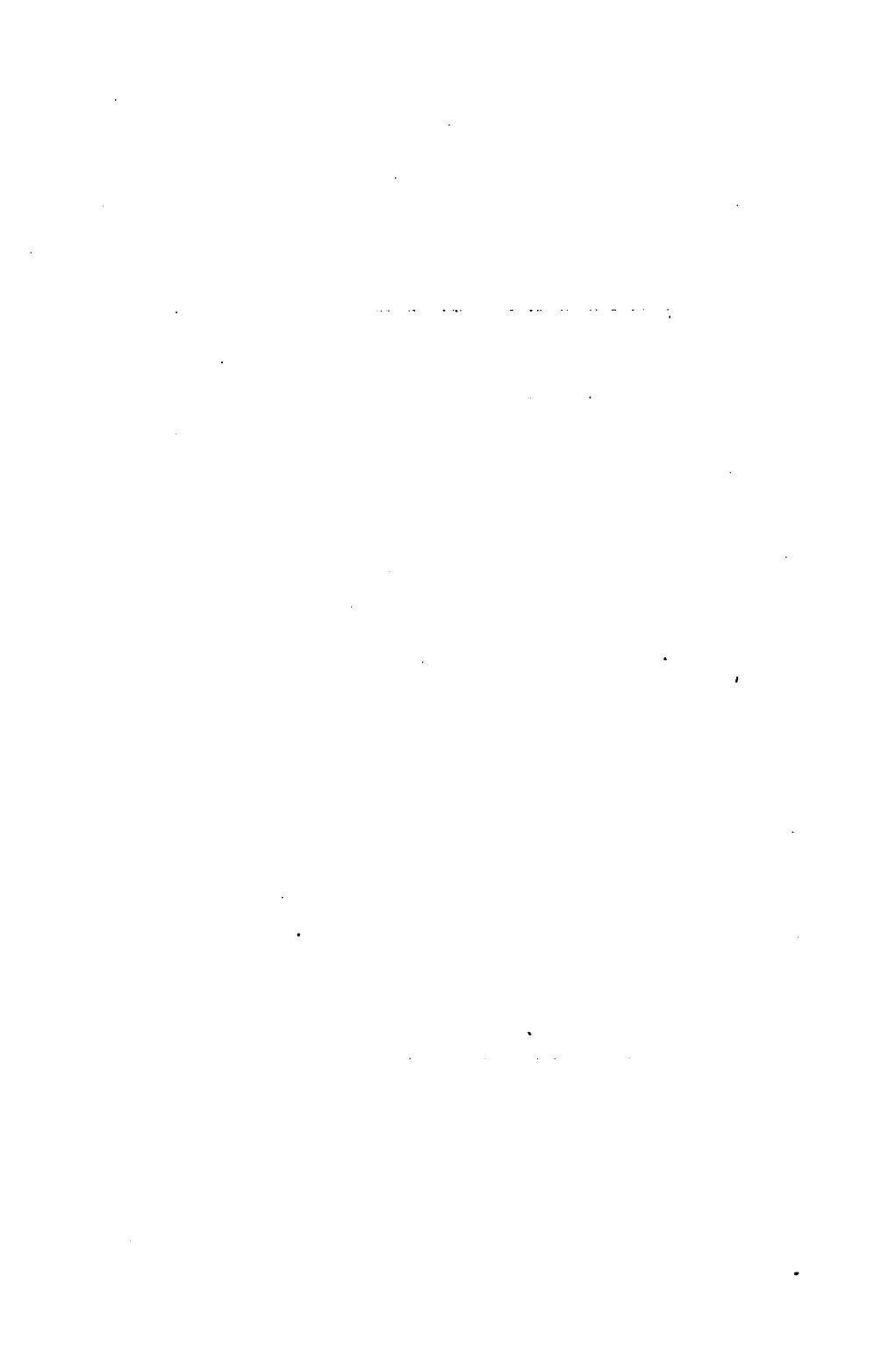
"Lie down!" I hastily ordered the men at the 3-pounders near me.

"Repeat the signal," said Blake. It was never repeated, however. Scarcely had the lantern begun to click afresh, than the stranger opened a tremendous fire upon us and the colliers around her, and as she did so, I saw the flash of a torpedo darting from our tubes amidships. The enemy must have seen it too, for she immediately tried to turn, but it was too late—the torpedo hit her in bow as she circled, and her game was up. Instantly confusion fell upon the convoy. One of the colliers, hit by the Frenchman's fire, was already settling down, a second collided with her, and all the others became hopelessly mixed up. Some came to a standstill, others went on ahead at full speed, and soon distant flashes, and the whistle and screech of shell, told that the long-expected enemy were upon us.

Fortunately the fire of the vessel we torpedoed had been ill-directed so far as we were concerned, and we steamed on, hoping to take some part in the action.



THE TORPEDO HIT HER IN THE BOW AS SHE CIRCLED, AND HER GAME WAS UP.



Going at twenty-nine knots, our little *Ratto* was neither a very visible nor easy target, and we received no hurt; but, on the other hand, unable to distinguish friend from foe, we did no damage to the enemy. We were steaming thus, hoping to find ourselves within torpedo distance of a Frenchman, when a signal rocket went up about a mile and a half to starboard of us.

“‘Private’ signal for destroyers, sir,” reported Bunting.

“What is it?”

“Join convoy, I think, sir,” the man replied.

Blake hurriedly opened the secret signal book, and found therein that the rocket was an immediate order for him to move the convoy on as quickly as possible in the pre-arranged course.

Reluctantly enough we steamed away to execute our orders, but the enemy had been busy among the colliers, having sunk or captured a large number of them already. A few, however, were tailing away to the northwards, and these we followed, and got away as fast as ever they could steam.

At daybreak we made out the *Fox* and



*Edgar* steaming after us, and, lying by for them to come up, we learned more about the night's work. The enemy, ten cruisers strong, had suddenly come up from all quarters of the compass, and our ships, having delayed them sufficiently for some of the colliers to escape, had made off, leaving the enemy firing at each other. The *Apollo* and *Decoy* had disappeared; they had supposed them to be with us, and not finding them in our company, there was but too good reason to fear that they had been sunk or captured. In any case, however, our sailing orders were too imperative for us to wait to look for them; we had been directed to get into the Baltic at all hazards, with as many colliers as might be able to escape from an attack. So, with nine colliers steaming as hard as ever they could, we hastened on to the Baltic, hoping against hope that the French astern would believe that they had sunk such steamers as they did not find amongst the captured—hoping, too, that we might be in time to replenish the empty bunkers of the British Baltic fleet.

Apparently the French believed we were done for, as we were allowed to pursue our way in peace. Soon we were steaming over

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the still blue waters of the Baltic, hearts beating high in the hope that after all we would relieve our countrymen in their dire necessity. Nine colliers did not carry very much coal, but they would bring enough to keep things going for awhile.

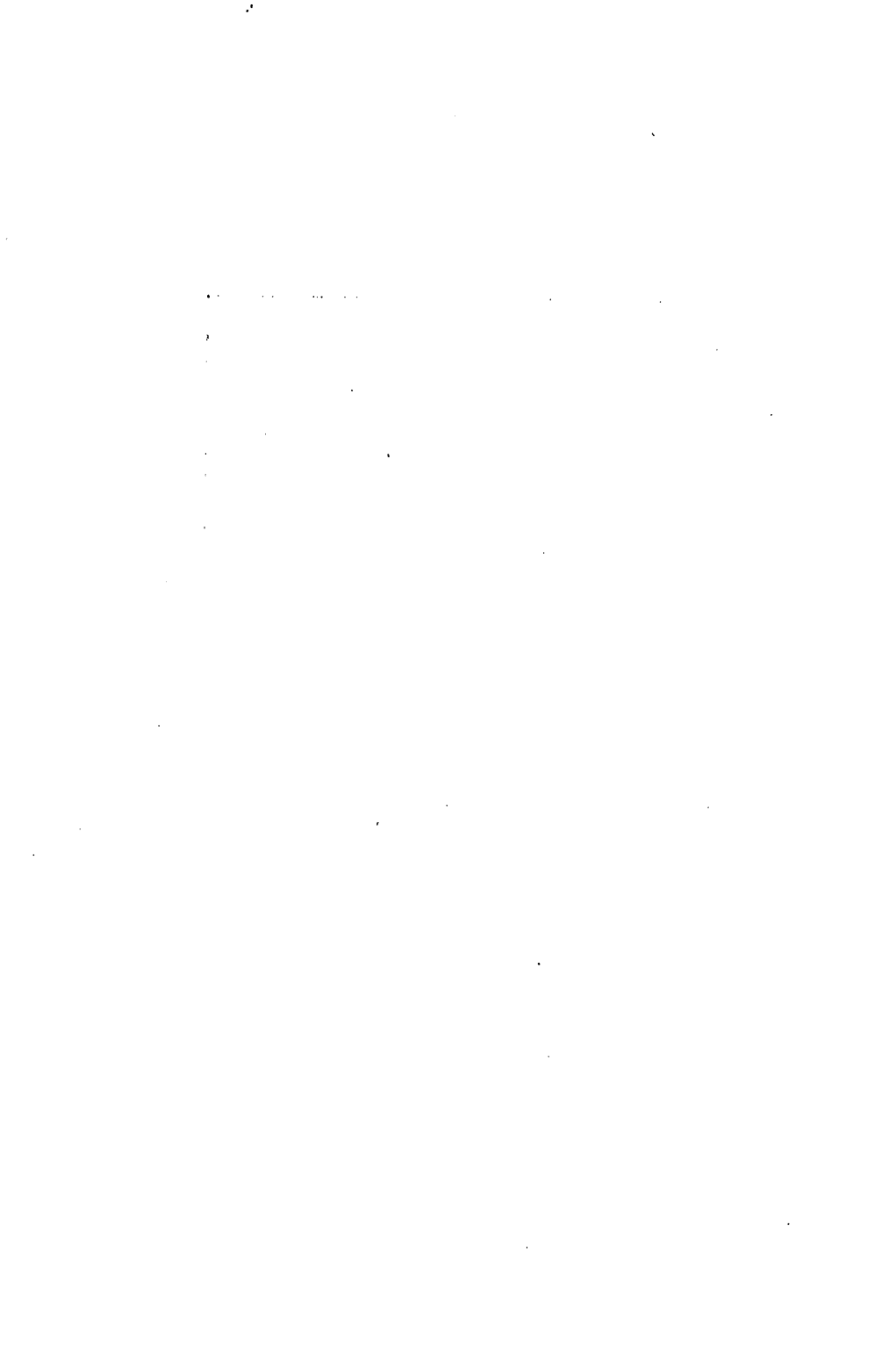
## CHAPTER VIII

### ENGLAND'S AEGOSPOTAMI



SOME little time passed, and we sped along over those deserted waters, meeting no British cruisers, as we had hoped to do, but since, when last heard of,—some four days before our departure,—the whole of the British Baltic fleet were skulking about in the Abö archipelago, this was not entirely a matter to be wondered at.

We were steaming along one day off Dantzig, spread out over the water, the better to sight our friends, when we met a British catcher hotly pursued by Russian cruisers. The *Edgar* and *Fox* went to her assistance, whereupon the Russians retired, but more of their ships coming up shortly afterwards, we all had to run for it; and we, getting separ-





**THE BRITISH FLEET!**

ated from them, never saw either our cruisers or colliers again. For ourselves, we managed to shake off our pursuers and to edge round in the direction of the Finnish coast, where we expected to find our own ships.

Find them we eventually did ; for the next day we came upon a regular forest of ships' masts, standing above the sea where it was shallow along by the islands—and this was the British fleet ! While we steamed cautiously among the sunken vessels, trying to recognise them by their rig, we were hailed from a little promontory that jutted seawards ; and, turning our glasses in that direction, noted some ragged-looking men in naval uniform chased by a mixed mob of Russian soldiers and peasantry. We lowered a boat and manned our guns, in the hope that we might learn something from the fugitives if we succeeded in rescuing them. The men, plunging into the water, swam to our boat under a heavy fire from the soldiers on shore, until we let into the pursuers with our Q. F. guns, which quickly dispersed them.

Hitherto we had imagined the runaways to be Russian deserters ; but when the boat returned, she had in her seven British sailors

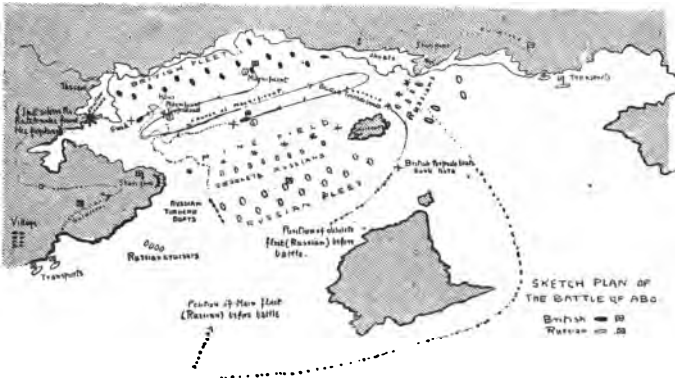
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belonging to the *Howe*, and from them we gathered the first news of the disaster of Abö, and the gruesome details of "England's Aegospotami." They told us how day after day the ships had lain concealed amongst the islands, scarce having coal enough left to keep the cruisers going to deceive the enemy as to the fleet's whereabouts; and how, a few days before, the cruisers had brought the intelligence that the celebrated *Rurik* had sighted our battleships, and easily shown her heels to our swiftest vessels when they sought to capture her ere she should convey the news of the British Admiral's position to the fleet that sought for him. Then came more of our cruisers with the news that the enemy were coming in overwhelming force; and all our ships got up steam as well as they could with the scrapings of the bunkers, woodwork, boats, and cabin furniture. Guns had been taken ashore and the front of the position mined, and here, in a landlocked bay, the British waited for their doom.

"When the Rooshians first come up, sir," said one of the men, a leading seaman, narrating his version of the fight to Blake, "they held off for a while on the horizon. Perhaps they

wosn't quite certain of our strength; maybe, too, they funked it a bit, thinkin' as how they'd gone and caught a Tartar. The delay wos no manner o' use to us, as we wos fast burnin' wot fuel we had,—wood we'd cut down ashore, or chairs an' tables an' cabin fixings.

“I was sent into the captain's cabin just



before the action, with a party to collect fuel, an' we cleared out everything that would burn. We tore down all the wood panels, we carried off even books, bedding, clothes, and pictures; everything that would burn wos sent down to the stokehole. It burnt—Lor', how quick it went!—an' all this time the Rooshians wos a-hangin' about in the offin', laughin' at us like.



"The admiral made a signal—it were the last he ever made—an' it read—'*England expects that every man will die like a true Briton. No surrender.*'

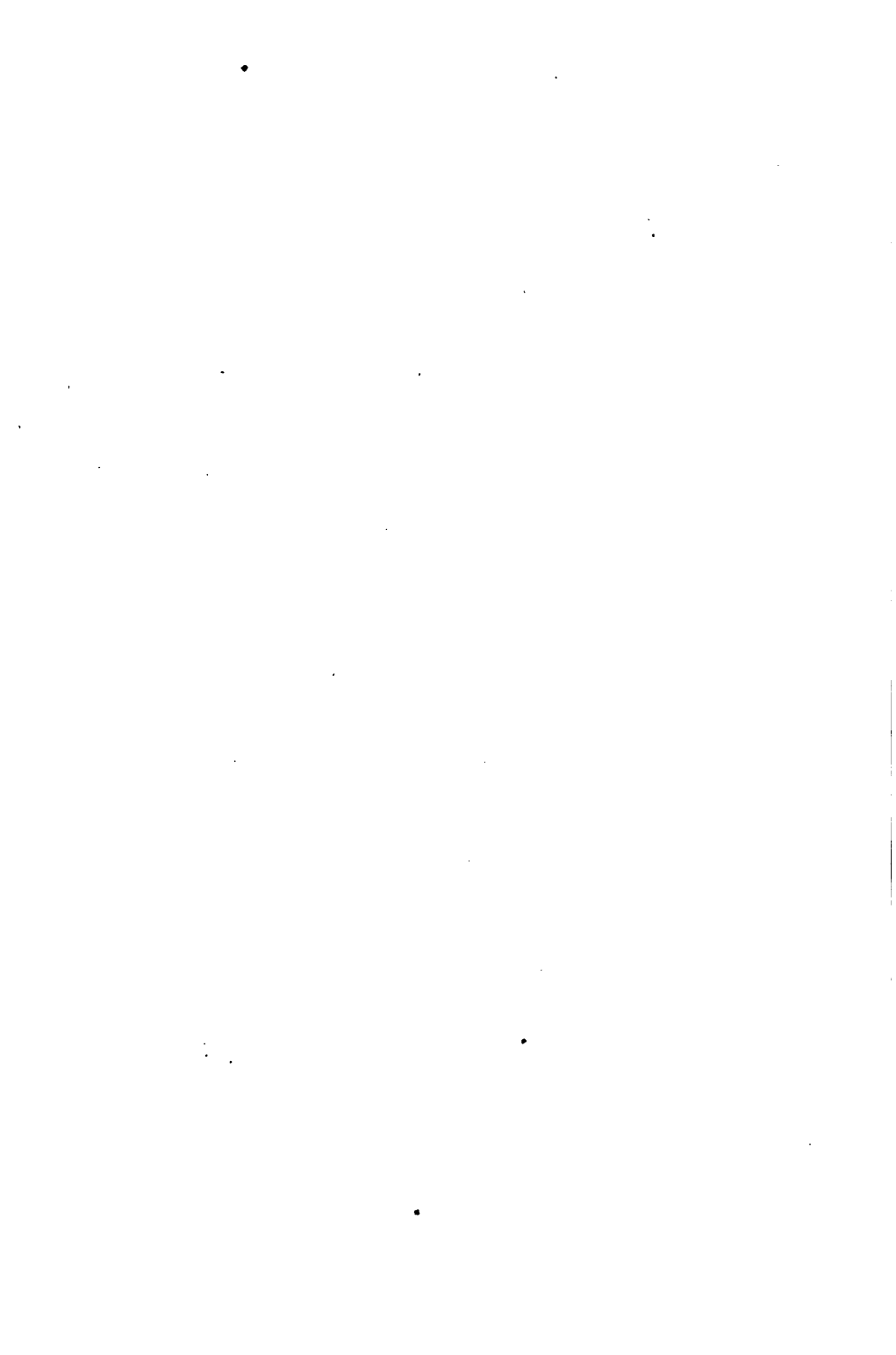
"We cheered and cheered agin; an' then out went our torpedo-boats to try an' move the Rooshians; but they never reached 'em, not they—every blessed boat wos sunk before they got within four cables of 'em; and then at last the Rooshians came at us.

"In front of their fleet wos a lot o' low freeboard turret-ships, gunboats, an' packets of that sort; astern of these come big ships an' a reg'lar cloud of torpedo-boats,—the sea wos black with 'em—black as the ace o' spades.

"The very first shell wot hit us—it must have been a mighty big one—pretty well did for the *Howe*. Hittin' us square in the unprotected battery, it bust agin' the after funnel, killin' an' woundin' every one at the 6-inch guns; a lot of deck above were torn away, and half the Q. F. guns on that deck wos silenced too. The wounded wos all poisoned by the fumes of the explosive, an' no one could even enter the battery for some while to come. Then, a few minutes later, the after barbette guns jammed, an' we had



**"THEY NEVER REACHED THE RUSSIANS."**



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nothin' but the two big guns forrud left to fight with. Presently another shell burst under the fore barbette, the turntable give way, an' the big guns, fallin', crashed right down through the armoured deck an' through the ship's bottom, so that she began to sink rapidly by the head. We were in shallow water, but the captain steamed yet nearer in shore; an' there the old '*Anyhow*' settled down, with her upper works still showin', an' makin' such practice as she could with her Hotchkisses.

"This was in the very beginning of the fight, sir, an' while the enemy was a-comin' up to close quarters. Soon they was close, an' blowin' us all to pieces bit by bit with their bigger quick fire guns. Our mast came down with a crash; an' in a very little while not forty of us was left on our legs.

"I were tryin' to do somethin' with one of the 6-pounders, when I sees the paymaster come up. 'Men,' sez he, 'I'm the only orsifer left. Get out a boat an' abandon ship.'

"'We'll see you damned first!' I calls out, unthinkin' like. 'Wot about the admiral's signal?' For we was all mad with him, a civilian orsifer, wantin' us to cut and run.

“ ‘Wot about it?’ sez he, smilin’. ‘Why, can’t we do more good in another ship? Come on sharp.’ I begs his parding then, thinkin’, all same, that, as we’d all got to be killed, I’d be lucky to get no court-martial or 10 A at least.

“There were a boat towin’ alongside under the ship’s lee—the only one we hadn’t burnt, ’cos she’d been fetchin’ wood up to the time the battle begun—an’ into this we all tumbles—that is, all wot were left of us by then, some five-an’-twenty odd. Quite near us wos the *Magnificat*, the new flagship, makin’ fine fightin’ of it, an’ we rowed over to her an’ wos took on board. They cheered us like blazes for comin’, an’ we wos soon at it agin as hard as ever.

“Luckily the *Magnificat* had some coal still left, an’ she wos soon steamin’ fast at the Rooshians, an’ I now see’d why they’d put their worst ships forrud—they had just gone to be blown up by our mines, an’ now their best ships come up closer. They rammed our side one after t’ other; our fellows hadn’t steam enough to get out of the way, an’ them wot didn’t get rammed ran ashore, an’ wos finished off that way. Some of our ships torpedoed the Rooshians, an’ some got tor-

pedoed themselves, but mostly it was ram and gun wot did it; an' come some half an hour later, the *Magnificat* were the only ship left afloat an' fightin. You see, sir, we'd a good nine inches of armour over most of our guns, an' that kept off a power of a lot of shells; an' wot with that, an' our still havin' a little coal, we was able to fight like ten ships.

"It weren't no manner of good, though, for all that: the armour couldn't stand batterin' for ever, the coal was well-nigh done, an' our speed got less an' less; while we fired so fast that ammunition soon began to run short too. You may wonder as how the admiral didn't try to run for it at the last, but he hadn't the coal, an' so he just kept on tryin' to do as much harm to the enemy as he could before we went under.

"Well, it weren't for long, sir. We'd nothing left to fire at their torpedo-boats with, an' a couple of the beggars sneaked up an' fired all their torpedoes into us. The *Magnificat* went down with a reg'lar rush in eight fathoms, her bilers bustin' as she did so, an' those of us wot was lucky swam ashore.

"We got into a little cave, an' watched the

Rooshians sendin' boats to haul down the white ensuns wot still flew from the British mastheads, an' havin' done this, all their iron-clads wot was left formed up into line abreast, facin' the wrecks of our ships, an' fired a saloot; then they all dipped their ensuns an' stood out to sea."

"*Mortuis salutatio!*" said Blake gravely, as the man finished his tale.

"Well," he added, after a lengthy pause, "are you the only survivors?"

"I can't say, sir; plenty of us got ashore, but the islands was full of soldiers who'd been landed some time before to capture our shore guns, an' they took scores of men prisoners as they swam to land. We dursn't venture out of the cave till nightfall; an' then, nigh dead from cold and hunger, we hunted along the beach for limpets an' things to eat. There were a little stream wot trickled down by the cave, so we had plenty of water, an' we hung about there—a dozen or more of us—till to-day, when one of our A.B's. was fool enough to yell to a girl who was pickin' up seaweed on the beach. She ran off like a mad thing, so I sez, 'Clear out while we can,' an' we all got out over the cliff an' into some long grass

on top. Then we sighted your ship, sir, an' we wos a-wavin' to you when up come the soldiers, an' we cut an' run for it till you come to the rescue; for which we thanks you kindly, sir."

We hung about the coast looking for further survivors, but we found none; and several Russian warships appearing on the horizon, we made off in another direction at full speed.

"We must find our colliers," said Blake, after hearing the engineer's report, "for we haven't enough coal to take us back under easy steam, let alone the risk of capture by so doing. My great grief is that the coal-workers of England don't live by the seashore, for, by heaven! if they did, I'd make for the place and shell it till there wasn't a man left alive, or a stone remained standing; it is this coal-strike that has ruined England. All we can do now is to try and cripple the enemy in small ways; the day for another Trafalgar is past for ever."

Yes, it was past; past even more certainly than we then dreamed of, for that very night it came about that England no longer possessed a fleet. A foggy afternoon, with our




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ironclads blowing their sirens, a fleet of French torpedo-boats guided and attracted by the sound, were the two leading points of that practically unpreventible catastrophe that paralysed the Empire, and scattered panic broadcast through the land. The story of this week of disaster is too well known to need repetition in these pages,—history is full of it—and full too of our last despairing cry to Germany, on whose alliance the nation had reckoned so vainly.

## CHAPTER IX

### HOW WE ESCAPED

HETHER we should find our colliers at all was a good deal open to question, since by destroying them the enemy could make pretty sure of getting possession of any British warships left in the Baltic; without the precious black diamonds ships were only so many useless hulks. As it turned out, we never met the colliers; the sea was deserted of everything save a few German men-of-war, which had been gaining cheap naval knowledge by watching the fighting.

“I think, sir,” said my fellow-sub to Blake,—“I think it wouldn’t be a bad idea to run alongside one of these German packets and take his coal from him by force.”

“On the ground that the end justifies the

means, eh, Thorne? No, that won't do at all; for we should either have to stand the brunt of, Lord knows what, for doing it, or else sink the German with all hands, so that no one should lay a complaint against us; and I suppose you'd hardly advocate that," replied the skipper, with a grim laugh.

"Perhaps they'd give us some on the quiet, in a friendly sort of way," I suggested.

"You do, do you?" said Blake. "Well, it's a pity you haven't read the newspapers a bit more. I think that's a North German Lloyd over there in the fog—we'll overhaul her, and test your idea of doing things in a friendly sort of way."

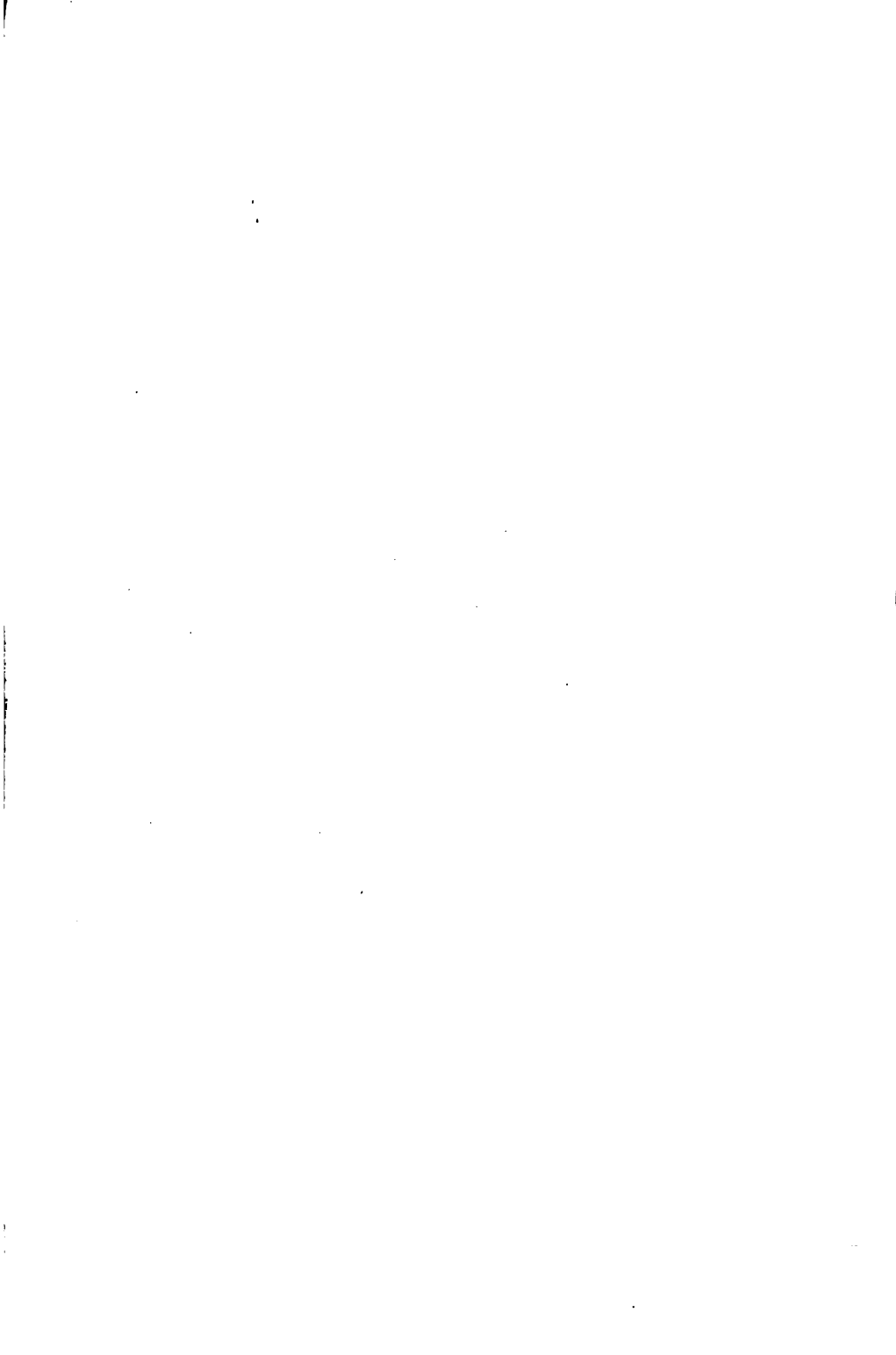
In a short while we were within hailing distance of the steamer.

"German, ahoy!" called the skipper; then, turning to us, "What the deuce is the German for coal?"

Neither of us knew, though Thorne volunteered quite a dictionary of German swear-words.

"Probably he knows English, sir; try him in that," said I.

"Ahoy!" came the answering hail from the German.





“YOU ENGLISH ARE NO LONGER ZE SEA-BULLY.”

Page 150.

“Have you any coal to spare? we want coal,” we yelled in unison.

“Ja, ja,” he replied; but kept on his way just the same.

We hailed him again and again, and after a bit a stout, red-bearded Teuton got on the edge of the bridge and made a speech in our direction; but the purport of his words we could not catch. At the risk of collision we got close alongside—so close that her sides towered high above us, and we could hear the sneering personalities of the passengers, who had crowded to the side to gaze at us. Some lumpy German girls on the promenade deck levelled heavy witticisms at our battle-worn uniforms, but there was no reply to our request.

“Can you spare us any coal?” hailed our skipper again.

“Nein, nein; ze contraband of var.”

“No matter, we must have it; charge what money you will for it, we must have it.”

“Nein, mein friendt. You English are no longer ze sea-bully. You are egdsinguished, and your von leedle shib will soon join ze ozers—you vill not haf ze time for to burn it;” and then he laughed and said something

in German that seemed to mightily amuse the rest of them.

The plight we were in was bad enough, but to be taunted with it by a German merchant skipper! Blake kept his temper outwardly, however, as he replied—

"And suppose we take it from you by force?"

For answer the red-bearded one pointed to a German ironclad looming up through the mist, a four-funnelled monster that no one could mistake; and then he laughed long and heartily.

"Damme! I've a good mind to blow the fellow out of the water," growled Blake.

The ironclad and steamer had been busy exchanging signals; the former now drew nearer, dipping her flag to us—ironically enough, no doubt—as she did so, and we punctiliously returned the salute, while our late acquaintance went on her way, the laughter of passengers and crew still ringing over the water.

The ironclad seemed disposed to be nasty, and after all it was small wonder. I own to a sensation something like what I experienced when caught by the farmer in an orchard

in my *Britannia* days; and I think we all felt that way more or less.

Both vessels were lying alongside blowing off steam. It was no use our trying to run away from right under her guns; the only thing to do was to brazen it out as best we might. The long and the short of it was, that she sent a boat to us, and a very dapper officer, in striking contrast to our shabby, war-worn uniforms and filthy decks, came on board us.

"I understand, sir," said he to Blake in excellent English, "that you have been trying to take coal from our merchant ship yonder? I sympathise with the downfall of your nation's sea-empire, but I do not think that it justifies piracy on the high seas, which, to put it plainly, is what your attempt would have amounted to, had you been able to carry it out."

"Look here, sir," said the skipper, facing him squarely, "I acknowledge that, but for your arrival, we should have taken what we required, though we should have paid for it. I regret the incident, but it was unavoidable. The issues depending on our return are so momentous that any course is justifiable. Put yourself in our place."



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The German made no answer for a while, seemingly turning the matter over in his own mind; then, rather to our surprise, he said, "In your place, Mr. Englishman, I think I should have tried to do the same thing. I regret our inability to help you,—for that matter, I regret that our ships are not fighting side by side with yours;—but regrets only are vain. Should you by chance find a couple of our boats loose, with coal in them—well, you know your English proverb about finding being keeping. Should you do so, please return the boats." And then he took his leave.

Following in his wake an hour or so later, we sure enough came across a couple of large boats crammed with sacks of coal. These last we got into our bunkers, and, having neatly folded the sacks, returned them and the boats to the ironclad with many thanks.

The German's good offices did not end even here, for he held on the same course as ourselves till we were clear of the Baltic, and, keeping close on his off side, we managed to pass unobserved a Russian ship or two that, had they seen us, would doubtless have managed to cut us off in the Straits. The

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Baltic Sea Canal had of course been closed to all belligerent warships.

We had precious little coal, however, and were pottering along in the North Sea very slowly, when, by great good fortune, we came across the *Elizabeth E. Greenwood*, a big American collier flying a French flag, and of her we made a bogus capture. As she was fitted with the Temperley transporter, we coaled from her then and there; and for a consideration that must have cost Blake no end of money, her skipper—a “character” named Sinbad N. Rock—consented to accompany us on our fateful mission.

Our coal difficulty being thus over, we went on at fifteen knots,—which was the utmost the *Elizabeth E. Greenwood* could manage,—and in due course, without meeting either friend or foe, we arrived at Aberdeen, whence Blake despatched various letters and telegrams that had to do with the great scheme. Here, too, we filled up with coal, so as to keep our supplies in the Yankee for another day; and this done, we made south until night, when we doubled round, and thence at easy speed, keeping well out to sea round the North of Scotland, and then southward again till we

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came by night off the west coast of Arran. Blake's first care on arriving there was to land with half a dozen bluejackets and march across country to Lamlash, which he reached in the early morning, before anyone was astir. This little expedition cut the telegraph wires and destroyed the instruments, to prevent the possibility of any news of our presence being sent to the mainland by that means; and Thorne and I then brought the *Rattlesnake* round to Lamlash Harbour with the collier in tow.

The steamers from Ardrossan and Glasgow had ceased to run since the early days of the coal strike, and we found the harbour deserted save for a few fishing-boats and a trading sloop. These we scuttled, lest their crews, putting to sea, should reveal our presence; and after that we felt safer.

There was some excitement and consternation when the good folk of Lamlash awoke to find us lying in the harbour, close in shore. We flew no colours, and were at first taken for foes; rumours of disaster perturbed even this secluded spot. Until we had steamed round the island again, and destroyed or captured every boat we could find in creeks

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or inlets, we let them think what they pleased of us; and by the time we returned, found some preparations for defence going on, if the gathering together of a small body of men armed with sporting guns can be so styled. They were glad enough to learn our nationality, and readily supplied us with provisions, of which, fortunately, they had no lack, though the prices charged were, as was perhaps natural enough, exorbitant.

This business of catering fell mostly to me, and glad I was of an opportunity to stretch my legs on land again. Though I went ashore in plain clothes, I was, as a stranger, quickly noticed; and innumerable were the questions put to me, questions to which I returned as evasive answers as possible. Even here it was best to be as secret as possible over our plans, and this Blake had impressed upon me again and again before I departed on my mission. It was as well that he had warned me, for the destruction of the telegraph, now universally known, had raised curiosity as to our motives in the minds of the most thoughtless, and, do what I would, I was simply besieged with questions. At last, finding that I was taciturn, whenever my back was

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turned they set to work to cross-question the bluejacket I had brought with me to carry my purchases; and gladly enough I let them do so. The bluejacket, knowing nothing of Blake's scheme, could not accidentally reveal anything; nor was he likely to surmise aught that would not with equal probability occur to his questioners.

My purchases completed, I was returning along the lengthy village street, when a couple of men, evidently tourists, came out from a hotel near the landing-place.

"Excuse me, sir," said one of them, addressing himself to me with a smile, doubtless intended to be ingratiating, "but I understand you are an officer of the warship in the harbour?"

I told him that I was.

"In that case," he went on, "you will perhaps forgive some pardonable curiosity on my part—on the part of both of us, in fact. These wild reports of a disaster to our fleet in the Baltic—have they any foundation in fact?"

"The whole fleet is destroyed," I answered, somewhat curtly, I am afraid, but somehow I did not like the man or his way of asking.

“Deuced unfortunate — sorry, I’m sure. Might have been worse, though,” he continued in a half aside to his companion. “You’re quite sure that no vessels escaped—enough to join with the ships left and win a battle?” he went on to me.

“As I told you before, the whole fleet is destroyed, so far as I know; and to the best of my belief, ours is the only British ship that got out of the Baltic,” I replied.

“And your ship—is she likely to do anything?” questioned the other.

“I really cannot say. Time will show.” Then, remembering Blake’s horror of newspaper men getting hold of any information whatever, I suddenly asked them what papers they represented.

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” the first speaker remarked, with a smile, and, fumbling in his pocket, he produced a card, setting forth that he was one Green, having something or other to do with the Stock Exchange. “My friend here,” he continued, “is also a stockbroker,”—mentioning his name,—“Mr. Fergus, very well known and respected in the City, I assure you. We’re both heavily interested in the war—heavily interested. It was terribly un-

fortunate for us to get stranded here so long—no steamers—still we managed fairly well with the telegraph. Now, however, that your captain has seen fit to destroy the wires which were so important to us, I trust that he'll be willing to run us over to Glasgow as a slight recompense. We'll be prepared to pay handsomely for the passage, of course."

"You'd better come on board and suggest it to him yourself," said I, smiling inwardly as I thought of the reception such a speech would be likely to meet with from Blake.

"Thanks, I'm sure," he drawled. "Well, I fear we detain you. I'm glad this Baltic news didn't come a few days sooner—very glad. Good day to you, and thanks again."

"Good afternoon," I answered more curtly than ever, and continued my way to the landing-stage, where the boat awaited me.

It took some little while to get all my purchases properly stored, and while this was being seen to, I had leisure to observe my late acquaintances. They were busy bargaining for the use of one of the few small pleasure-boats that Blake had left in the harbour—all the larger boats were hitched up to the *Groggy Lizar*, as our bluejackets

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termed the Yankee collier. The one who had done most of the talking to me—a red-headed person with small beady eyes, close together, and an enormous moustache—was endeavouring to overcome the objections of the boatman to venturing near the *Rattlesnake*; so, at least, I judged from their gesticulations. His companion, a dark, ordinary enough looking man, was taking no part in the conversation, but watching our boat as though speculating whether it would be any use to beg a trip off from me. Having no desire to be bothered with them again, I expedited our departure, and was soon on board ship once more, telling Blake of our probable visitors, but concealing their intended request, as I didn't want to spoil sport. Blake, however, listened to my tale very seriously; indeed, he made me repeat it, somewhat to my astonishment, as to me the incident seemed trivial enough.

“I thought them most splendid examples of your theories as to the patriotism of the average modern Briton, sir,—self first, and country afterwards,” I said.

“Unfortunately it doesn't end there in this case, I'm thinking. We'll have trouble with these fellows if we don't look sharp.”



"Trouble in what way, sir?"

"Many ways. Still, it may be mere fancy on my part; but, all the same, I'm glad they are coming on board. If they strike me as at all suspicious, I'll keep them here, though I can't say I feel anxious for the society of these sort of bounders."

What possible harm these fellows could do, or why they should wish to do any to us, was beyond me; still, I didn't argue the point with the skipper. "He's been getting devilish fidgetty of late," I confided to Thorne, who remarked in return that he'd noticed the same thing too. "It's the disadvantage of not being only a sub," said he, and we thought no more about it. The enterprise upon which we were now embarked was as serious as could well be, and looking back at it now after the lapse of years, I wonder at the easy, devil-may-care sort of way in which Thorne and I took things all through. We were very young, both of us, and to the young nothing is serious; and that, I suppose, is the real reason why we never troubled over the probable fact—if indeed it occurred to us—that our friends and relations would, by this, have given us up as dead, for Blake had

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refused to allow us to post any letters during our call at Aberdeen, and the last they had heard of us would be our trip on convoy duty to the Baltic. As a matter of fact, the news of the *Rattlesnake's* arrival at Aberdeen had been communicated to the papers—we couldn't keep that visit secret. Fortunately for Blake—unfortunately for our friends—the papers a day or two later contained a brief report of how, putting south from the Scotch port, the *Rattlesnake* had been attacked and sunk by French cruisers, all on board being lost. This, however, I did not hear of till long afterwards. I thought when I heard it, and still think, that Blake himself was in some way responsible for this report getting afloat; though in what fashion he managed it, I cannot surmise.

## CHAPTER X

### OUR BASE OF OPERATIONS



SOME two hours after my conversation with Blake, I noted a small shore-boat making for us, and an inspection through glasses soon revealed to me the forms of my stockbroking friends. I hastily informed the skipper, and he came on deck in time to be there when they came alongside.

"We wish to see the captain," the red-headed one cried as soon as they were within hail.

"I am the captain," replied Blake politely, "what can I do for you?"

"Oh, we'll get on the ship and tell you presently." The remark was off-hand enough, and doubtless due to their noticing Blake's war-worn uniform : we were certainly, all of

us, a disreputable lot to look at; war service in a destroyer is bad for clothes.

The skipper allowed them to come on board and down into the wardroom, where they sat down and soon made themselves at home. "My name is Green," said the red-headed one, patronisingly, as I thought, "and my friend here is called Fergus, a very well known man in the City—very well known—indeed, I may say we are both men of substance there, commanding as we do a large amount of capital."

"My name is Blake, and my friend here is called Bouverie," replied the skipper. I believe he was half-inclined to add, "very well known on board the *Rattlesnake*," but checked himself.

"Blake?" remarked Mr. Fergus. "I seem to know the name. Had a clerk of that name once, a very smart fellow. Any relation?"

"I'm afraid I haven't the honour," Blake answered, with a slight cough. "Well, what do you want of me? My time just now is rather occupied, so if you will kindly state your business, it will be a convenience," he continued.

"Ah yes," said Green, "just so. Well, the

fact of the matter is that my friend Mr. Fergus and myself are much incommoded by the fashion in which you have destroyed the telegraph here, which, you know, is public property. However, we are willing to believe that you did it with some reason that may explain it satisfactorily,—quite satisfactorily,—so if you can see your way to just running us over to Glasgow or Ardrrossan at your earliest convenience—well, we will promise that you get into no trouble over it on our account."

"Well, if you want to go over to Glasgow, why don't you go?" asked the skipper, with an assumption of innocence that amused me mightily.

"Go? Why, because we can't, that's why! You appear to have stolen—bought, I mean—all the boats in the place; which was a clever move, very clever, and I'm sure we admire it. However, you can name your own terms, you know."

I expected to see Blake turn purple with rage, but he controlled himself well. "I don't quite follow you," he said; "but I'm afraid it will be quite three weeks before you can leave Arran."

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“You may as well out with it, Green,” put in Mr. Fergus. “The fact is, Mr. Blake, you’re one too many for us. However, you’ve got your exclusive information, and have of course sold accordingly ere this; but it’s a little hard that you should keep us from it too. It doesn’t make any odds to you, you know.”

“Not the slightest,” was the reply. “However, I’m quite sure that you won’t be able to leave Lamlash for quite three weeks or more; moreover, any attempt to leave the island would result in your getting shot. Good-day.”

“You’re an unprincipled scoundrel, that’s what you are!” cried Green, completely losing his temper; “and by Heaven I’ll be even with you yet! The country hasn’t got to quite such a state that a man can steal boats, destroy Government property, and threaten murder — actually murder — with impunity. This from a public servant, who runs away from his fleet in order to rig the money-market! Humph! they may well say the country is going to the devil, they may” —

But here Fergus, who seemed the more

level-headed of the two, interrupted him. "Don't be a fool, Green. You'll be getting chucked overboard or something of that sort, if you don't take care," he added in a half aside.

Blake and I burst out laughing—we really couldn't help it. I'm not sure that they wouldn't have preferred us to be indignant; but the whole thing was such an absurd farce, it was impossible to get angry about it or treat it seriously.

Bidding us a stiff "Good-day," they went off, and we saw no more of them for a while.

"Dash those idiots!" said Blake, when his merriment had subsided. "It's all very well to laugh at them, as we've got them boxed up in the island; but, all the same, they'd smash up all our plans for the sake of their infernal stocks and shares if they got but half a chance. However, since they can't, let them sit and curse us all day long if it pleases them."

The next day, the third after our arrival, smoke was visible on the horizon beyond King's Cross; and by and by the *Niger*, with two torpedo-boats in tow, came into harbour. In the course of the next day or

so, we were joined by several more catchers, destroyers, and torpedo-boats, all of which had deserted as soon as practicable after the receipt of Blake's telegrams; and one of the destroyers, the *Hornet*, brought a welcome addition in the shape of the collier *Lilly*, which it had been her duty to escort somewhere or other. The indignation of Captain Higgs of the *Lilly* had at first been intense; but later, on learning what was in the wind, he had come to, like the patriotic Briton that he was, and refused to take any compensation for the great inconvenience Blake's plan compelled him to undergo.

Although we were safe at Lamlash, so far as news of our whereabouts being carried thence was concerned, we were daily exposed to the danger of discovery by a hostile cruiser, or even by an English one not in the secret. To minimise this danger, our ships were disguised as much as possible and anchored in very irregular fashion; but our skipper—or commodore, as I should now call him—was anxious to mine the entrances to the harbour, which would guard us safely from any foe, and, better still, enable us to save coal by drawing fires. Hitherto we had lain with



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steam up, and there seemed little prospect of our being able to discontinue it, for we needed the explosive in our torpedoes for its own work, and such gunpowder as we were able to collect ashore was totally insufficient for our purposes. We got what protection we could by putting our torpedo-boats at the entrances; but there was always the risk that a cruiser, seeing them, would either be able to sink them before they could get within striking distance, or else turn tail and be off to get her friends the moment she spotted them; and the enemy were well able to bring up enough ships to shut us in altogether, had they wished to.

Altogether we were at our wits' end; and then it was that Captain Higgs proved himself of inestimable service. Running over in his collier to Glasgow, where he was well known, he managed somehow to obtain a quantity of dynamite and blasting powder, as well as a few other things we needed. Returning by a roundabout course, so as to avoid suspicion, he brought the news that the city was in a panic. Business was practically suspended; visits from enemy's cruisers were hourly expected. He also brought us

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newspapers, wherefrom we learned how a French army corps had landed on the south coast, and, taking Portsmouth in the rear, transformed it into a naval and military base for further operations ; and all the other events that I need not recapitulate here. Captain Higgs did us another service too, by giving out to the Glasgow folk that a French cruiser had been at Lamlash and bombarded the place. This explained the destruction of telegraphic communication, and prevented any attempt to repair it, for fear the enemy was still lying there.

The dynamite was gladly welcomed by Blake, and soon we had electrically fitted mines at both ends of Holy Island, worked from a camera obscura situated on the top of the hill ; and after this we felt safer. We were none too soon with our mines, for, ere we had everything complete, a French cruiser, making in the direction of Glasgow, headed for our harbour. Training our guns and torpedo tubes in her direction, we waited breathlessly for results.

She seemed in no hurry, whatever she was at ; and after steaming to within a few yards of our outermost mines, withdrew again.

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Had anything suspicious been noted, and was she going off to alarm her consorts?

After a wait that seemed to last for hours, but cannot really have been very long, back she came again; steaming slowly and cautiously. Lieutenant Orchardston, who had charge of the mine-field, eagerly watching the plate of our extempore camera obscura, saw the pictured warship pass phantom-like over one of the circles marked thereon to indicate the radius of destruction; and as she did so, he pressed a button.

A huge column of water enveloped the enemy; with it came a wave that rolled all our vessels till the sea broke over their decks; and when we looked again, there was nothing but troubled water left where the cruiser had been. The *Dasher*, which alone of us had steam up, went out to the spot, but no survivors were found; the annihilation of the enemy had been as complete as it had been instantaneous!

## CHAPTER XI

### A PICNIC, AND WHAT CAME OF IT

OR the next few days I was very busy, acting as a sort of representative for Blake; and queer enough were some of the jobs on which I was engaged. For two whole days I was collecting clocks, out of which Blake and the other skippers constructed some extraordinary infernal machines, destined for several dummy torpedo-boats that Blake had invented and set great store by. The idea was to make the dummies explode if rammed by any craft. These dummies were made in a very simple fashion. A couple of shore-boats covered all over with tarpaulin were set some fifty feet apart, and a light tree-trunk lashed fore and aft between them, and to this was attached a framework bearing a rough general resemblance to the hull of a ninety-foot long

torpedo-boat. In the water the thing floated top-side down, the boats forming imitation conning towers, while a little canvas well tarred and stiffened with iron rods and hoops made a very presentable funnel and other deck erections. Some planks amidships made a good resting-place for the explosive that was destined to be packed there if we could get it; and, regarded from a little distance, especially at night, the craft looked very like a small genuine torpedo-boat. We constructed seven of these dummies altogether, stowing them on board the colliers as soon as completed.

It was while this task was going on that I happened to get on the sick-list. There was nothing particular the matter with me, so said the doctor from the *Speedy*; a good tramp ashore on the hills would probably put me right; but I felt altogether run down. "All you subs want a good run ashore," he said, "to keep your livers from getting sluggish."

Blake, hearing of the medico's verdict, fell in with the idea at once. "I'll send the lot of you, I think—you're only in the way on board ship; you'd better fix up a picnic or something of that sort on the hills."

Hence it came about that, the next day, eight or nine of us, accompanied by a cart loaded with hampers of good things, toiled up the steep winding road, past the golf links and across the moorland beyond. Here, looking down upon our ships in harbour reduced to the size of cockle-shells, we drank in the pure mountain air and gazed away over Holy Island to the distant Scotch coast. Here, too, we emptied the cart and picnicked in right royal fashion. It was a glorious relaxation after being cooped up on board ship for so long; it was a pleasure in itself to lie amidst the sweet-smelling heather and golden gorse and feel that we lived. By and by we split up into smaller parties, some going along the road to Brodick, others remaining where they were, no longer anxious for fresh exertion.

Thorne had gone on to Brodick with another sub and an engineer from the *Speedy*, a very decent sort; and by and by I wished I had gone too. I could still see them, little specks in the distance, when I started to follow; but it was one thing to see them, another to be able to attract their attention and get them to wait while I caught them up. Gradually they disappeared, going down the dip of a hill,

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and I had begun to despair of catching them when I remembered a short cut through a wood which I had learned some two or three years before when we had been at Lamlash for the manœuvres. It was contrary to Blake's orders to leave the main road,—he had made a chart of the exact course we were to follow, so that, in the event of any ship being sighted from the hill, the cart could come along the road and fetch us back,—but the temptation was too strong for my weary legs; and soon I was breast high in the brake-fern on my way to the little wood. Here the beauty of the scene, tinted with the glories of autumn, was too much for me, and I sat down to rest awhile and dream by the side of a little stream that babbled through the fern-grown rocks with a soft lulling murmur, like the music of angels. I sat and mused, and presently I must have fallen asleep.

"You've put the wire in cipher, of course." The voice awoke me with a start, and little wonder, for it was the voice of Mr. Ferguson, "well known in the City."

"Of course," replied another voice,—Green's,—"and I reckon we ought to make a mighty pile out of this."

“Yes, if nothing goes wrong. You’re sure you’ve got everything prepared, I hope?”

“Everything. Photos of the fleet as I took them the other day—positive proof—quite positive; names of principal officers, and everything enough to convince the most hopeless sceptic; but, bless you, the report alone will send them up like one o’clock.”

I dared not move as I had at first intended. Chance had made me overhear what seemed to be a deliberate plan to wreck Blake’s scheme for the salvation of England, and I was determined to hear the last of it, so as to know how to set to work to circumvent them.

“Well,” continued Green, after a pause, “what arrangements have you made? Have you seen the girl?”

“Seen her? I’ve done nothing but see her for the last two days, till I’m sick to death of her. Promises of money didn’t seem enough to work the oracle, so I promised to marry her. As well promise an ell as an inch, you know,” he added, laughing.

“Yes. Well, it’s a good thing you picked her up. I’d made sure that that infernal outside broker of a ship’s captain had collared every boat in the island. It’s pleasant to find



that he's not so smart as he reckons himself."

"He did collar all that were afloat, but he didn't chance to find old Davie's boat-house, thank the Fates! Well, the girl ought to be here by this; 't isn't her rule to keep her prospective husband waiting. Ah, here she comes."

From my hiding-place in the ferns I caught a glimpse of a yellow-haired, freckled lass hastening down the path I had recently come by.

"Well, my dear," said Fergus, "here you are. You know my friend Mr. Green, so don't mind him. Now you must give this to old Davie yourself, mind, and tell no one—not tell a soul. It's for some nice dresses and pretty things for you to be married in, so if it doesn't go over at once,—without the ships in harbour knowing of it, mind, for they'd try and steal it,—if it doesn't go over to-night, we shan't be able to be married at all; and I shall go away and never see you again. And you mustn't let even old Davie know who it's from. Now give me a kiss, my dear, and hurry off."

The girl promised readily enough, gave the

desired salute, and went along the path in the direction of Brodick.

“I guess we’d better be moving on too,” said Green. “Poor little girl!” he added, with a momentary twinge of remorse; “seems a pity to deceive her so, too; but”—

“Can’t be helped,” said the other shortly. “If our gallant pirate in the harbour catches old Davie,—as there is a risk, of course,—well, he’ll never associate us with the affair.”

“Hum! I’m not so sure of that. However, if it does fall through, we’ve still another chance; whereas, going ourselves, we should risk everything in one deal.”

I had scarcely patience to wait until they were out of earshot, then I jumped up and ran as hard as I could towards Brodick, catching sight of the girl before she had reached the village.

As I ran, I had had dim visions of snatching the telegram out of her hand, but a little thought convinced me that she would ere this have secreted it about her person, so any attempt to obtain possession of it by force would have its awkward side.

Fortune favoured me again, as it chanced. Ere the girl had reached the village, and

while I was yet hesitating as to what course to pursue, a young fisherman sprang out of the hedge and confronted her. The girl screamed and hid her face in her hands; while I, feeling that I was doomed to go through life playing the eavesdropper, hastily got inside a field.

"Give me that letter!" angrily cried the man in the Scotch dialect that I shall not attempt to reproduce here.

"I've got no letter. Let me pass," she answered.

"That's a lie—a wicked, sinful lie, for which you will go to hell and burn! I saw him give it to you myself—there!" he retorted in a passion of jealous rage.

The girl's hand involuntarily went to her bosom, and in a moment his rough fingers had torn open her dress and seized the fateful telegram. Thrusting the weeping girl from him, he held it aloft and laughed.

"So!" he shouted; "you would be having letters from your new sweetheart and forget all about your old one?" He tore the missive into fragments, turned on his heel and ran away down the hill, leaving the girl crying bitterly by the roadside.

Overjoyed at the turn of events, I hastened on to Brodick. I felt sorry for the girl, and sorry too for her native lover, and, impelled by some inner force, felt it my duty to try and mend matters. I stopped as I reached her, and sought to explain that she was being made a fool of; but, woman-like, she would have none of it, and finally giving it up as a bad job, I went on my way. In the village, just outside the hotel, I met the fisherman; he at least could be made useful to us. Briefly as possible, I sought to explain to him how the land lay, and though the projected money transactions were beyond him, he understood enough to know that treachery was afoot. Finally, I impressed upon him the advisability of watching Green and Fergus, telling him that if he only let Captain Blake know where to lay hands on them, they would trouble him and his no more. This done, and feeling that I had secured a valuable ally, I went on into the hotel, where Thorne and the others still were. Telling them of what I had overheard, we hurriedly retraced our steps, and, reaching the cart an hour later, galloped down the hill towards the harbour for all we were worth.

Reaching the *Ratto*, I told Blake of my

adventure. He was thunderstruck at the news, but cast about at once for means how to act.

"It never occurred to you, I suppose, to find out who was old Davie, and where he lived?"

"No," I answered, startled; "'pon my word I was fool enough never to think of it. Still, Brodick, I suppose."

"If it is Brodick, we may be in time, otherwise we may be too late." He hastily gave orders for the *Ratto* to weigh at once, signalling his news and intentions to the other captains; and in a very short time we were steaming out of the northern entrance and round to Brodick as hard as we could pelt. "You see," explained Blake, "they have heard all about it from the girl ere this; and, for aught I know, they will have started themselves, knowing what any further delay might probably mean."

At Brodick we got as close inshore as possible, then, our boat being lowered, Blake was rowed towards the land.

As the boat was speeding thither, a man hailed us repeatedly from the pier.

"'Tisn't here," he cried to Blake; "they've gone in old Davie's launch, some time ago."

“Which way?”

“I don’t know, sir, which way, but they went some two or three hours since.”

“Back as hard as you can row!” I heard Blake order, and I got ready to be off the moment he should come on board.

“Here’s a pretty kettle of fish,” he muttered as we raced out of the bay at a good twenty-five knots; “and to think that if you hadn’t disobeyed orders, we’d never have known of it at all. Well, as ’tis, all our plans are as good as wrecked unless we catch these fellows. It serves me right too; I should have been more careful, and left nothing to chance.”

It was now dark, but the moon lit up a fair expanse of water, so that a boat would be visible at some distance. Look-outs crowded the ship; we had to look for hostile vessels as well as for our special quarry. Neither off Glasgow nor Ardrossan could we come across anything like old Davie’s boat, so we tried working more to the northward, though hope was getting faint.

“Small boat on the starboard bow,” reported a look-out man; and we nearly shouted with joy as our eyes fell on a small sailing boat

close in shore some three miles ahead. In another five minutes we were right upon her, so fast were we steaming; but even that five minutes made us nearly too late. While we were yet a hundred yards away, not daring to approach nearer for fear of grounding, the boat ran upon the beach and the two stock-brokers sprang out of her. "Give me a rifle," ordered Blake sharply,— "smart!"

In an instant a loaded rifle was in his hands. "Stop, you hounds!" he cried to Green and Fergus.

Between them and the comparative safety of a little wood there was some fifty feet of moonlit beach, a beach with rocks here and there, behind which a man might find plenty of cover.

"My God!" cried Green; "would you murder us in cold blood?"

"If you move I shoot," Blake replied. "Go back to your boat at once, if you wish to save your lives."

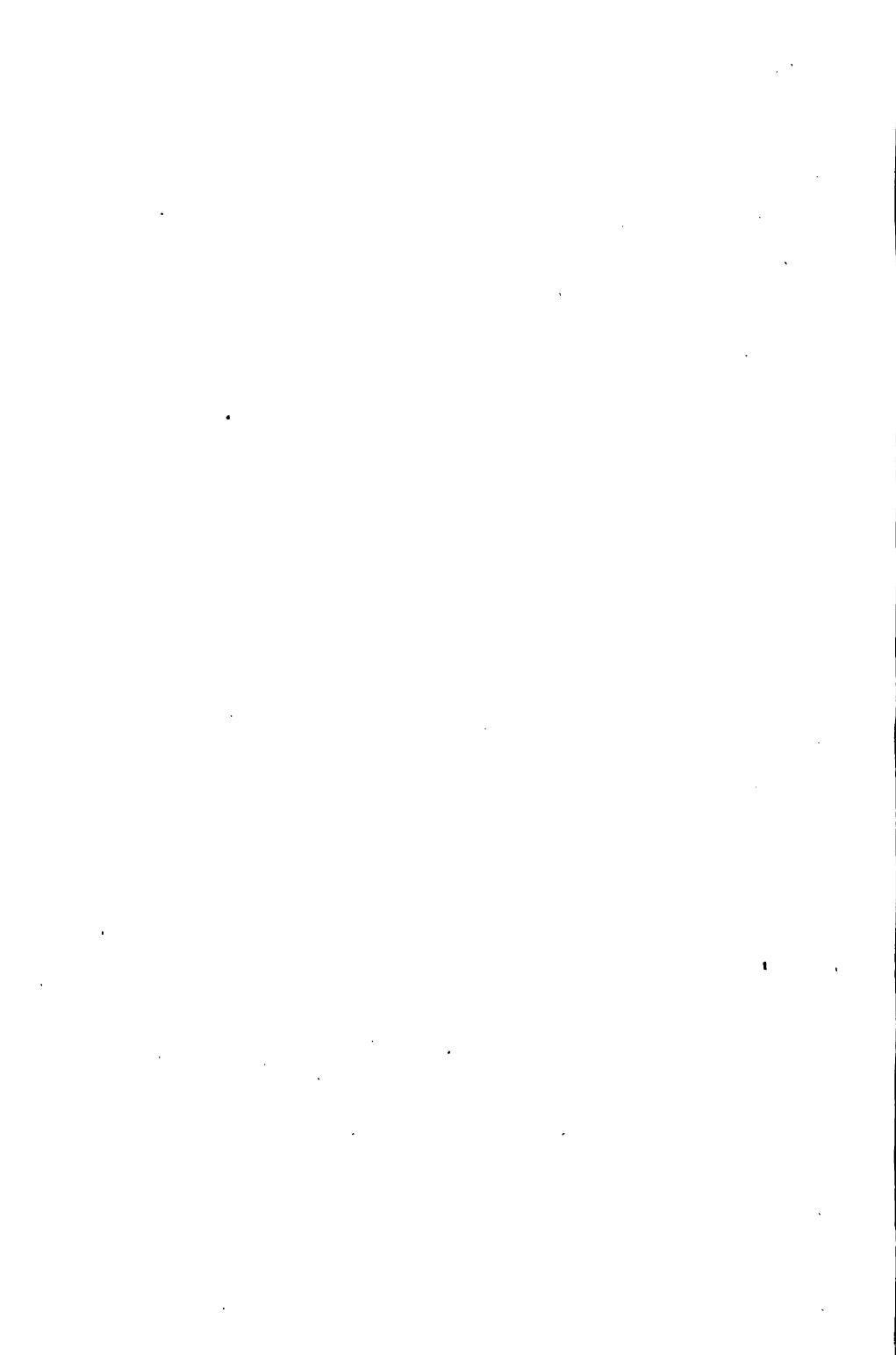
This, however, they either could not or would not do. "Take the gig and fetch them, Bouverie," Blake called to me. I hastened to obey, and soon the boat ran upon the beach alongside the other, and, followed by the men,



"WOULD YOU MURDER US?" CRIED GREEN.

*Page 192.*





I ran towards the stockbrokers. They were quite close to me now, and I could see the perspiration streaming down their faces as they watched our approach. Then, as we drew yet nearer, Fergus said to his companion, "It's now or never—cut!" and with the same they started to run like hares for the wood.

"After them!" I cried; but at the same instant I heard the report of a rifle, and Fergus, with a shriek, sprang into the air, to fall back dead.

Green fell too, not hit, but grovelling in terror. "Heaven have mercy!" he moaned; "they're murdering us—murdering us. And it would have been a million pounds—a million pounds."

We soon secured the frightened wretch, and with no very gentle hands dragged him back to the whaler.

"Tow off the other boat," hailed Blake, "and sharp as you can." The two men in the boat, one of whom we presumed was old Davie, sat there quite still and motionless, dumbfounded at the turn of events. Doubtless they expected to be shot like Fergus, but they were too terrified to make any attempt at escape. Green, lying bound in the bottom of the

whaler, kept up his incessant wail, "Murdered for a million pounds—a million pounds," nor could my angry orders quiet him.

"What are you going to do with him now, sir?" I asked Blake, when we had got on board again; scuttling old Davie's boat as soon as we were in deeper water.

"I don't know; hanging's about the handiest thing," replied the skipper grimly. "It's about the best thing we can do for the country too."


"It seems very horrible, sir."

"Well, I'm not going to do it now, anyway; he shall be tried properly first. We've got to see to getting back next. As for old Davie, that silly old fool won't trouble us again; send him forward with the other fisherman."

Old Davie went forward, and a miserable time he had of it at the hands of the blue-jackets, who related to him horrible deaths by torture which he would shortly undergo. Green, still secured, was left on deck, keeping up his incessant moaning over the lost million; but we had other things to see to than bother about him just then.

## CHAPTER XII

### MORE TROUBLES

E managed to slip back into harbour without sighting anything hostile, but the signal that met us as, in the growing dawn, we steamed to our billet, told us that we had returned none too soon.

“Large armed steamer flying British mercantile and blue ensigns making for harbour. *Hornet* gone to reconnoitre,” came a semaphore from the *Speedy*.

“Confound it all! everything seems conspiring against us,” exclaimed Blake. “Ten to one some cruisers are after him.”

We presently made out the British steamer, a large four-masted packet; and astern of her were three cruisers and some torpedo-boats, all in hot pursuit, and firing as they came.

The plan of the British captain was evident: he hoped to entice the enemy into the strange harbour, where, likely enough, they would run aground, while he could escape at the northern outlet, the one by which we had just returned. Willy-nilly, therefore, we were in for a fight, and it was of the last importance that none of the enemy should escape. How to capture or destroy the lot of them was, however, a problem beyond me; it was not likely that all would enter the harbour, and the destruction of a vessel inside would be the signal for the others to make off. I quite gave it up as hopeless; but Blake seemed confident enough, and gradually I was reassured.

The merchantman was nearer now, almost over our mine field, and the enemy, seeking to wing, rather than destroy her, fired continually. One of the cruisers and the two torpedo-boats went round to the northern entrance, with a view of shutting her in—so we assumed, as they disappeared behind Holy Island. All this time we had lain with steam up, but making no move; the *Hornet*, which had been recalled, lying quietly inshore by the island, the rest of us in our usual billets.

After a while Blake made a signal ; whereupon the *Ferret* and *Dasher*, with the torpedo-boats, moved gently away toward the northern entrance, and disappeared round the corner, to fall on the enemy in that direction.

Suddenly the oncoming merchantman stopped ; a shell had hit her square in the engines, and she lay helpless, directly over our mine field. Like a flash, one of the cruisers was alongside her, and a rattle of musketry told us that they were going to carry her by boarding. This was an unexpected event, as the mine could not now be exploded without destroying the English ship, so we were rather in a hole what to do ; but Blake was not the man to overlook possibilities, and he had allowed for this one. The *Speedy* and *Hornet* opened fire on the French, who were evidently considerably startled ;—they had hitherto taken us for trading craft apparently ;—and at the same moment there came the sound of rapid firing where our torpedo-boats were engaged to the northward.

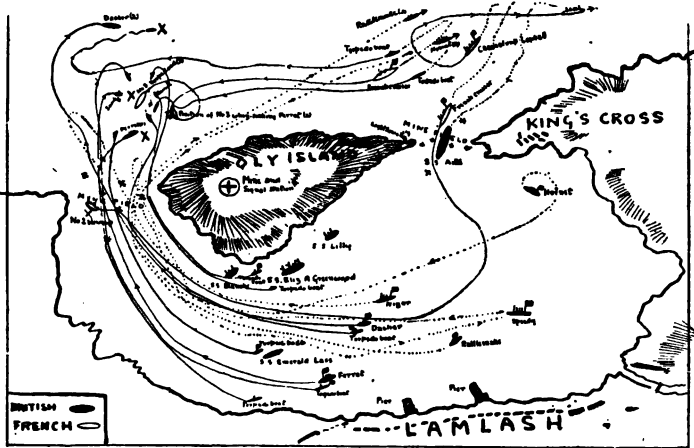
One good broadside from either of the French cruisers would have sunk any of our vessels, but we did not stay to receive it ; we made rapidly for the northern outlet, and so

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drew one of them boldly after us. This vessel, the one that had gone alongside the prize, had sent most of her boats to tow that craft out to sea; a proceeding for which we were exceedingly thankful, since it left our mine field free and open. Cruiser No. 2, however, seemed to dart off towards her other consort, with a view, as we then supposed, of falling upon us as we emerged from the shelter of Holy Island. As we came round the island, whence the sound of firing still proceeded, we found a battle royal in progress. The third cruiser was firing broadside after broadside at our flotilla of torpedo-boats, which were coming on her from all sides; while some distance away the *Dasher* was chasing one of the French torpedo-boats. Neither the *Ferret* nor the other torpedo-boat were to be seen: as we learnt later, our destroyer had been literally blown out of the water, while sinking the other boat under the lee of the hostile cruiser.

Our six torpedo-boats made short work of their quarry, though two of them were sunk in the struggle. We did not stay to watch this, however; a matter of far greater moment attracted our attention; for, already getting

small on the horizon, was the cruiser that had remained outside. It was imperative to capture her at all hazards, and we and the *Hornet* cracked on every ounce of steam we could manage. A stern chase, however, is ever a long one, and though her timidity at



BOUVERIE'S SKETCH PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF LAMLASH.

venturing down the Irish Channel led her to seek the sea-room of the Atlantic, we still feared that the French vessel might find friends before we could overhaul her. And, overhauled and all, it struck me that we'd have a pretty hard job to tackle her. We estimated the speed of the runaway at something



like nineteen knots ; our own maximum, regulated by that of the *Hornet*, was twenty-five ; we were, therefore, theoretically at anyrate, in a position to catch her up in well under two hours, allowing for the start she had obtained. Actually, however, our speed was soon much reduced by the ocean rollers, and at the end of three hours we had just got level with her. As near as I can guess, we were then some five miles away on her port quarter, the *Hornet* being in the same position to starboard. It took us a good while to forge much ahead of her, but this, however, was not particularly necessary. "It's no good attacking till night," said Blake ; "we should only be blown out of the water for our pains."

The day wore on. By the cherub, we were now 210 miles from Lamlash, when the *Hornet* signalled a strange sail on the starboard bow.

Blake ordered us to "man and arm ship," and signalled the same to the *Hornet*. If the new-comer were a hostile warship, as indeed seemed only too probable, we would have to risk it, and do our best to sink the Frenchman before he could join his friend.

Carefully we examined the strange vessel, whose course lay across our own ; and at the

speed we were going, she was soon pretty visible through our binoculars.

“By all that’s wonderful, sir,” I cried to Blake, “she’s one of our first class cruisers—flying the white ensign all right, too.”

“Well,” he returned, “we must get in first shot, so as to have chief claim to the prize. If this cruiser gets hold of her, she’ll find out everything; and so far as we are concerned, the Frenchman might then just as well have escaped, for the cat will be out of the bag.”

He edged the *Ratto* in nearer, and we began to blaze away with our 12-pounder, doing no particular damage, I expect, for the range was a very long one; though it is doubtful whether we should have done much more harm at close quarters—the 12-pounder is not designed to attack armoured cruisers with. The enemy—she was the *Chasseloup-Laubat*—fired back at us, but fortunately we escaped with little injury, our small size being a great protection to us; still, their aim was very good for all that, and they would soon have settled our hash could they have got us within range of their Hotchkiss guns. We had a pretty uncomfortable time of it as it was, and I, for one, was heartily thankful

when we steamed back again to our former position.

It was rather a puzzle to us why the *Chasseloup-Laubat* did not turn as soon as she knew that the coming vessel was English; but we fancied her skipper was sick of running away, and hoped that by trying conclusions with our cruiser, he would manage to sink his pertinacious followers, by enticing them within range during the heat of the action. Otherwise, as he must have well known, it was merely a matter of waiting for night—so soon as the night should come, he would be torpedoed by one of us, to a certainty.

The British warship was now steaming as hard as she knew how, and in a very short time the cruisers were exchanging shots.

We had made our numbers to our friend as soon as she was well in view, but she did not reply for some little while, and when she did, we were not very easily able to distinguish the signal.

"Union, M—something, sir," reported the signalman. "I can't make out the last flag. Must be the *Crescent*, sir," he continued, after a pause, during which he had consulted the signal-book.

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The *Crescent* was at that time flagship on the North American station; so what she was doing off the coast of Ireland was beyond us. Still, there she was, and fighting in fine style, too.

She had signalled to us to keep out of the way, and Blake obeyed readily enough.

"It's a rum hole we're in, altogether, Bouverie," he remarked to me, as we stood on the turtleback watching the fight. "If we'd been left to manage the Frenchman as best we could—well, there we'd have been; and if I lost the number of my mess in sinking her, our chums at Lamlash would still carry on. Now we are in a fix all the way round. If the *Crescent* wins, there'll be some pretty stiff diplomacy required to get hold of the prisoners, and keep the victors from finding out about the Lamlash flotilla, both from the French and from us; and if the *Crapaud* comes off victorious, there'll be some extra trouble that way. Really, it looks as though the only solution of the problem would be for these two ships to blow each other to pieces; so our predicament isn't a pleasant one at all."

The two warships seemed to be well on

their way to the mutual destruction spoken of by Blake, but the vastly superior armament of the *Crescent* told more and more against our chase. The Frenchman manoeuvred beautifully; seeking, and indeed obtaining, all the advantages of his superior end-on-fire; but though every now and again he could bring five guns to bear against the *Crescent's* four, these moments of superiority rapidly passed, and a broadside of seven Q. F. guns poured shells into him at the rate of forty a minute. In twenty minutes all was over, and the battered wreck of the *Chasseloup-Laubat* became an English prize.

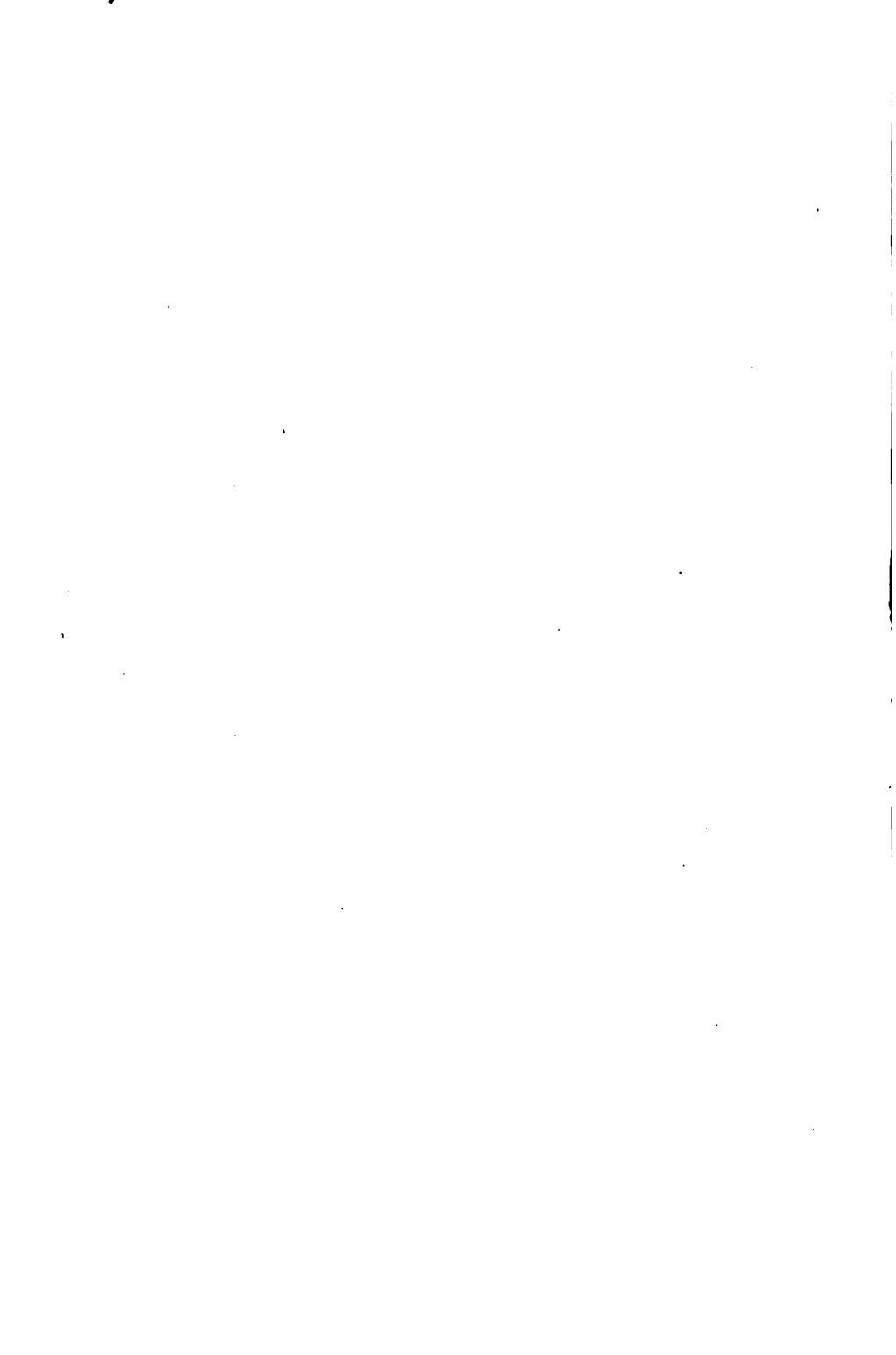
"There goes a plucky Frenchman, if ever there was one," said Blake, as we watched the tricolour hauled down. "A plucky fellow, for all his mysterious running away at Lamlash. And now our troubles begin. Well, we must take the bull by the horns, and try what bounce will do."

He semaphored to the *Crescent* a message of thanks for having rendered assistance to him in the matter of capturing the Frenchman, and wound up by saying that another Frenchman—a first class cruiser—had slipped on ahead, and escaped him.



THE TWO WARSHIPS SEEMED TO BE WELL ON THEIR WAY TO THE MUTUAL  
DESTRUCTION SPOKEN OF BY BLAKE.

*Page 204.*



“I should like to see the admiral’s face when he gets the message,” laughed Blake. “However, it’s our only chance.”

The arms of our semaphore had scarcely come to rest, when the skipper started another to the effect that he would send a prize crew on board the Frenchman, and that he couldn’t think of occupying the admiral’s time, or troubling him any more in the matter.

For answer came a request for Blake to come on board the admiral. The *Hornet*, I should have mentioned, had got alongside the *Chasseloup-Laubat* almost immediately after she struck, long before the only boat that the *Crescent* seemed able to send could reach her; and, as afterwards transpired, Garron—the *Hornet’s* skipper—had hastily divided her crew into two portions, those who knew whereabouts they had found us, and those who did not, with a view of sending the ignorant ones on board the *Crescent* first. The *Crescent’s* boat was, however, recalled ere she reached the prize, so the precaution turned out to be unnecessary.

Blake was back again in ten minutes with a radiant face. “It’s all right,” he cried, as he climbed on deck. “I’ve fixed it all up, so



let's hurry to work before he changes his mind. Take the gig, Bouverie, and hang on to the cruiser till I send you other orders. You can get on board, of course, and tow the boat astern. The *Hornet* is to take the Frenchman into Londonderry with what's left of her crew, and then join the flag at a rendezvous. The *Ratto* has to cruise with the flag for a day or two, or till the war ends—I forget which, but no matter." Then, seeing how aghast I looked, he added, laughing, "Well, never mind now; I'll tell you all about it in Lamlash harbour to-morrow. Hurry up at present, and be sure and keep a sharp eye on the prisoners."

A few minutes later saw me boarding the prize, and a terrible sight it was that met my curious gaze. I had seen a fair share of service during the war, I had taken part in more than one fight, but all my battles had had to do with torpedoes, or at the most, small shell. Here I saw before me the awful and devastating effect of 9-inch projectiles, and a sickening sight it was. Decks were torn and riven asunder, guns hurled from their mountings had sunk through the deck, breaking all before them; dead and wounded men were

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here, there, and everywhere ; blood and brains of men were splashed over all. The whole ship was but one vast charnel-house, and the marvel to me was, not that she had held out for twenty minutes, but that any one had survived twenty seconds, for she was riddled like a sieve where the quick-firing guns had hit her. Only one executive—a sub of about my own age—was left standing, and very, very few of the crew were still alive. What damage the *Chasseloup-Laubat* had inflicted on the *Crescent* I did not see. I understood later, however, from Blake, that things were pretty bad there. Curiously enough, little damage was done to the engines of either of the combatants, and soon we in the prize steamed away eastward again, though at about half the speed the ship had made when steering to the west. Smaller and smaller grew the great hull of the *Crescent*, as, with the little *Ratto* following in her wake, she continued her cruise towards the setting sun ; and for the first time during the war I was embarked on a duty in which Blake had no part. But if Blake himself was not there in person, he was at least watching over us in spirit ; for Garron of the *Hornet* was his most

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able lieutenant. Looking back at it all now, I realise, in a way that did not strike me then, the tremendous genius of Blake, and the skill with which he invariably thought out every possible emergency. I am perfectly certain in my own mind that he had at Lamlash arranged every detail of what was to be done in the case of an event like that in which we had just taken part. It was not so obvious to me then, however, and I spent some anxious hours in the darkness, as I paced the bridge of the *Chasseloup-Laubat*, now dreading that the prisoners would attempt to mutiny, now with a sickening fear that I should never see Blake again.

I was aroused from my half-dreams by a signal from the *Hornet*: "Lie by, and send a boat-load of prisoners on board me."

I did as was ordered, sending some seven wounded men, who had been attended to by this time by the French doctors.

A second boat full of prisoners was now sent—unwounded men this time. The boat was just returning when I heard a look-out in the *Hornet* sing out, "Destroyer coming up astern full speed, signalling green over red."

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I looked aft; saw in the darkness a dim white wave advancing; heard the throb of engines going at full power; then like a flash a well-known hull shot past me.

It was the *Rattlesnake* come back!

## CHAPTER XIII

### BLAKE'S REVOLT



**I**N a few minutes Blake had come aboard the prize, and I welcomed him like one risen from the dead. There was no time then to hear how he had rejoined us so quickly—the transfer of prisoners to the *Ratto* and *Hornet* occupied our undivided attention. In a short while we had removed the *Crescent's* boat's crew and the fifty men who alone remained alive of the brave French ship's company; then, taking out her torpedoes for our own future use, we abandoned the vessel. The *Hornet* fired a torpedo at her, she began to settle down, and thus ended the career of the *Chasseloup-Laubat*. We were again out of the wood, steaming back to Lamlash with light hearts; and so soon as we were well on

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our way, I asked Blake what had happened since our meeting with the *Crescent*, and how he had got rid of her.

"Oh," he said, laughing, "I've been taking a leaf out of the book of the Diplomatic Service. You see, old Stick-in-the-mud, bless him, took our claim to the Frenchman as genuinely meant on our part, and whatever he may have thought, congratulated me on our enterprise. When we met him, the old boy had just captured a privateer of sorts, and sent her off again with a prize crew; so he was choke full of prisoners as 'twas, without the *Chasseloup-Laubat's* people. I told him we could manage all right, and would take her into Londonderry without troubling him, so he might as well recall the boat's crew he'd sent on board. All of this he fell in with, and then began asking about the war, and so on. I told him the latest, which, to my astonishment, I found he was in entire ignorance of, though I should have known that, the cables being cut, he had no means of hearing so soon. When he'd got over his first surprise, he asked where we came from and what we were doing, so I had to pitch it a bit. I told him, in fact, that we were lying at Bantry with the

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*Hornet*, making little excursions from thence every now and again. He, on his part, told me that, having dished up all the French in his part of the world, he had to hunt farther afield. Now he would steam back to Halifax as hard as possible, collect his ships, and return to the Channel, and we two destroyers would be a handy addition. So it was all fixed up that he and I were to cruise around while the *Hornet* took the prize into harbour, and, Garron rejoining us at an appointed rendezvous, we were all to make for North America. 'Very good, sir,' said I; and as soon as it got dark, I dropped a bit astern of station, turned round sharp, and came along to here, as I'd arranged with Garron, at thirty knots. I don't know whether the old boy is looking for the *Ratto* or no, but we can't bring him to Lamlash to court-martial us all; we've sinned too deeply to draw back now, if we wished to even! Our special job will be over ere he gets across again, and we will join him then with pleasure."

"Well, sir, there's one consolation anyhow," I rejoined: "the Admiralty having been superseded by a Parliamentary self-elected Board, this precious concern has no more right

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to control us than our friend Green. And, talking of Green, what's become of him, sir? I believe I was supposed to keep an eye on him, but I can't remember seeing him since we left Lamlash."

"Oh, Green's all right. I came across him on deck after the Frenchman struck, about his own colour from fright and sea-sickness, poor devil. I stowed him down below lest some of the Crescents should see him, and wonder what the dickens we were at with a triced-up civilian on deck; I had him shovelled into the wardroom. Now he's gone forward, as I don't fancy our plucky French prisoner seeing this sample of an Englishman!"

Ailsa Craig at length loomed up in the morning sunlight, and soon we were lying beside our chums in the old harbour at Lamlash. We learned that the Frenchman who penetrated the harbour had been sunk by our mines while trying to come out to the rescue of the others, so all danger in this direction was past. As for the merchantman, she had been towed well into harbour during our absence, and her engines were now being



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repaired by her own people, who had made no demur at having to cast in their lot with the Arranites, as we called ourselves. Our new companion turned out to be the *Ailta*, a merchantman armed and manned by Naval Reserve fellows, and at the time of her adventure she was running the blockade that the enemy had already partially established round the greater part of the coast. The cruiser we destroyed shortly after our arrival, and our late visitors, belonged, I believe, to the blockading fleet, which must have become rather thin in our direction. Blake rather feared more coming to look for these missing ones; but the losses were put down to the *Crescent*, which thus did us a good turn unconsciously, and they were all busy looking for her.

The French sub remained with us on parole for some days after his men and Green had been transferred to the *Elizabeth E. Greenwood* and the *Ailta*. He was a decent sort, and as he could speak English fairly well, I got quite chummy with him—my French wouldn't go much beyond remarks on the weather. From him I learned that the skipper of the *Chasseloup-Laubat* had guessed what

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our presence at Lamlash meant, and so started to warn his friends at all hazards.

“Why did you attack the *Crescent*, then?” I asked.

“*Voilà!*” he replied; “what would you? When we found the two English dragonflies would not let us be, we knew that all was up. Said our captain, ‘It shall be the bigger ship that shall destroy us,’ and so it was. We had no hope, only to fight and die as brave men.” His eyes filled with tears as he said this, and, not quite knowing what to do, I shook hands with him several times as a mark of sympathy and esteem.

“And now,” he went on, “I wish it had been your captain to whom we had struck; for he is a great man, a modern Nelson, and he will destroy all my poor compatriots yet.”

I felt that he spoke the truth, and that if man could accomplish it, Blake, of all men, was the most fitted for the task; but, this being an awkward sort of thing to tell him, I held my peace, and changed the subject.

Our preparations were now going steadily onwards, the damages sustained in the late

action were being rapidly repaired, and in a few days more we should be ready to start.

"I say, Bouverie," Blake said one night, a week or so later, "you like adventures, so you can come on a spying-out-the-land trip with me if you like. I'm off in the *Groggy Lizar* to-morrow as a Yankee skipper, and you can come too if you care to."

I readily assented; I was already sick to death of Lamlash, its forced inactivity, and the utter dearth of news.

"Are you going to take Green, sir?" asked Thorne, with a smile.

"Good Lord! I'd quite forgotten that fellow's trial," exclaimed Blake. "I fixed it to come off this afternoon, too; though, 'pon my word, I don't know what we can do with him." And he started off for the Yankee collier.

Having nothing better to do, I asked leave to accompany him, so as to get my bearings before starting on the morrow's cruise. Green, somewhat violent, was being brought up from below as we boarded the Yankee. The terrors of the night when he attempted to escape, and his subsequent adventures, had

half turned the man's brain, and he was still keeping up his wail about the million pounds.

"I guess, if I were the Britishers, I'd drop him overboard with a stone round his neck, and no mistake," I heard Sinbad N. Rock, the Yankee skipper, observe to his first mate; but, fortunately for Green, Blake and his fellow skippers were less austere.

"Two hundred thousand pounds if you'll only land me in Glasgow to-day!" whined the wretched prisoner to his judges. "I'll make all your fortunes for you. I will indeed. It's a dead sure thing. Just buy the shares,—they'll give 'em away,—then set afloat the news of this fleet being here, and sell out. Oh, there's millions in it—MILLIONS!

"Yes," he went on, addressing Blake; "just you think of it, my friend. You needn't go and fight and get killed for nothing; but just stay in here and make a million pounds—a million pounds!"

"That's enough," said Blake shortly. "We've just met to settle whether it will be necessary to shoot you, or whether we can stow you away out of harm without killing you as you deserve."

"What!" he shrieked; "still wanting to murder me? How true it is that the love of money is the root of all evil. O God! save me, spare me, spare me!" and, sinking to the floor, he lay there moaning and praying after a fashion, while the discussion as to his fate continued.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet again, making a desperate effort to reach an open port, with what mad idea of escape, I know not.

"Be still, you miserable hound!" Blake shouted. "You don't think we're really going to waste powder and shot, or good rope either, over your wretched carcase?"

"You'll do anything to make sure of being able to buy up all the shares yourself," groaned Green, as soon as he had been brought to a standstill. He was utterly unable to conceive that we could aim at anything higher than the making of money. Money and the juggling with it were the gods he worshipped—he and thousands of others who, like him, disgraced the name of Englishman. But for him the days of money juggling were over, for he again fell to the ground, blood rushing from his mouth; a fit brought on by terror and anger had killed him.

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We sent his body ashore for burial, without sorrow and without regret; England, in her hour of woe, was better freed from such as he.

It was yet early when the *Elizabeth E. Greenwood*, with Blake as captain and me as supercargo, steamed out of the harbour on our scouting expedition—an expedition to find out and settle the day of our bursting forth as the avengers of fallen Britain.

It was a risky move enough, but we were too used to risks by now to trouble or think much about that; for myself, I was quite sure that Blake was fully capable of getting us out of any hole he might run into.

“Let’s see,” said Blake, as we paced the collier’s bridge: “we want dynamite; torpedoes, if possible; reliable news at all hazards. Well, here goes for it. Birkenhead is a likely place for that, but we’ll have a look in at Holyhead first of all.”

At Holyhead, which we reached without meeting any blockaders, we put in as a Yankee runner, and finding there a torpedo-

boat, No. 54, Blake sent me on board of her. The sub in command—Borcett by name—was an old "ship" of mine, and startled he was to recognise me in the supposed Yankee apprentice. He told me that he had been lying idle at Holyhead save for an occasional fruitless cruise on his own responsibility, during the whole of the war; and opined that both he and his boat had been completely forgotten at headquarters. He had, therefore, had very easy times of it, and even had his father on board as a guest. The old gentleman was a regular fire-eater; and, judging that by this time he must have picked up a deal of knowledge about torpedo-boats, Blake, at his earnest request, let him stay on board as a sort of acting sub to his own son.

From Holyhead, where, thanks to Borcett's telling us of them, we managed to collar a dozen spare torpedoes, we went back to Birkenhead. I could fill pages with this strange voyage, but my space runs short, and I must content myself with a mere relation of two of its leading incidents.

Arrived off the Mersey port, Blake flew the Russian ensign and a flag of truce. Get-

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ting into the torpedo-boat, he steamed swiftly towards the harbour and alongside a landing-stage, where the Mayor and Corporation had come in great haste, but Blake did not stay to parley with them. Hastily handing in a letter addressed to the authorities, he was off again at full speed, nor was he much too soon, for three second class torpedo-boats manned by local crews were making for the supposed hostile warship. No. 54 steamed up to these, with a view of giving them some explanation; but they did not wait to receive it, as they turned tail and ran back the moment they saw Blake coming. This was my first and last experience of local crews, who though plucky enough, doubtless, were much too undisciplined to be of any practical value for war service.

An hour or so later, a tug flying a flag of truce came out to us, bearing a local big-wig in person, a large quantity of dynamite, and quite an army of newspaper reporters. Blake and I hastily boarded her, as we did not want them in the Yankee collier, where they might have heard too much.

"Sir," said the big-wig to Blake, "do me the honour to allow me to shake hands with



you. We trust that you will be able to remain in the Mersey, which, as you must note, is far from adequately protected; indeed, I assure you, Captain — I'm afraid you omitted your name in your letter?"

"Whitehead is my name, at your service, sir," said Blake, giving me the slightest perceptible wink.

"Most appropriate name for a torpedo officer, I'm sure," replied the big-wig, and the scribblers behind him all made a note of it. "Hem!" he continued; "the price of the dynamite is £500. I suppose it will be all right with the Admiralty?"

"I'll send on board for the money in hard cash if you'd prefer it," answered Blake.

"Well, no matter; still, if it isn't any inconvenience, it would relieve me of a certain onerous responsibility."

At a word from Blake, I skipped on board the *Groggy Lizar* and got the coin from her captain, who, deeply interested in our enterprise, had taken the precaution of putting all his men in the fore-castle out of sight and hearing of the reporters.

When I returned, the big-wig was question-

ing Blake, and the pressmen jotting down his replies.

"It's a close secret, of course," Blake was saying, "but I am hiding away not far from the mouth of the Shannon. I hope to torpedo some of the enemy who cruise round there, but I hope most out of this dynamite. I'm going to mine Bantry Bay with it, and blow up all the French who use that place."

A dozen pencils were scribbling down the words as Blake uttered them, and the local dignitary ejaculated—

"Splendid! I suppose our torpedo-boats would be of no use to you? We might be prepared to lend them for a consideration."

Blake declined hastily, then, saying it was time for him to be off, we returned to the collier.

"It's good to be patriotic at times," I heard the local big-wig chuckle to himself as we made off; and in view of what he had charged Blake for his dynamite, I fancied he spoke the truth about himself.

The tug cast off, and we steamed away with the torpedo-boat following astern, and the stars and stripes gaily fluttering from our peak. As soon as we were hull down from Liverpool, Borcett made off for Luce Bay as

hard as he could pelt, we following in more leisurely fashion. This precaution was in case we should meet an enemy's cruiser, which, seeing a torpedo-boat in our company, might become unduly inquisitive; and it was a good thing that Blake was so cautious, for off the Calf of Man we sighted a French cruiser standing towards us.

She proved to be the *Duquesne*, a rather ancient old tub, to whom we could have shown our heels in a stern chase, had we so minded. She signalled to the *Elizabeth E. Greenwood* to lie by, and sent a boat to inspect us when we obeyed.

Sinbad N. Rock, as a seller of "notions" to blockaders, was ready to welcome the French officer, who might have refused to believe in the genuineness of the Yankee flag, had Sinbad been less American. The papers were overhauled and found satisfactory, the Frenchman was preparing to go, when his eye caught one of our dummy torpedo-boats that lay upon the collier's deck, from which the tarpaulin cover had partially slipped. He looked at it curiously, but before he could remark about it, the hand of Sinbad N. Rock crashed upon his back as he asked—

"Say, stranger, will you deal? A genuine torpedo-boat for one thousand dollars! Dirt cheap and a bargain! You can frighten the Britishers with it and no mistake, and no loss to you if they sink it. Real Brummagem! Wall, I guess I'll take eight hundred to clear."

The officer, but half understanding yet with suspicions fully roused, strode to the side and called to his boat's crew that he wished his captain to come on board; and they started back to the *Duquesne* to fetch him.

"I guess it's cut and run now, captain," said Sinbad to Blake.

Blake nodded, and full speed ahead was hastily ordered. The distance between the ships was about three cables, and until their boat reached them and they missed their officer, it was possible the cruiser's suspicions would not be aroused by our moving on. Going at fifteen knots, we should by that time be out of range of her guns, so off we went without delay.

"Collar the Frenchy, sharp," cried Blake to me; and I succeeded in seizing him just as he drew his revolver to fire and give the alarm to his ship. He fought like a wild cat

before we had him down, however ; still he was triced up at last.

At length it occurred to the *Duquesne* that our moving on might not be in order, and she fired a blank charge at us. Then, as we took no manner of heed, she sent a shot ricocheting across our bows, and a minute or two later one that went singing over us.

A broadside followed, but the range was too far for them, the shot fell short. Her ten knots were no good against our fifteen, and gradually we drew away till we had left her far behind in the glow of the sunset.

After that, calling in at Luce Bay for young Borcett, we got back to Lamlash without further adventure — indeed we had had our full meed of it already. Still, what with the dynamite and the necessary newspapers, we had profited well. The newspapers were essential requirements, as from them we could learn whether the time had arrived for us to start.

Blake and I scanned them eagerly, reading the war news, which included telegraphic reports of the bombardment of Sheerness by the Russians, and the complete failure of the Brennan torpedo, on which the *Medway* had

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counted so much. We were by now too used to tales of disaster to be very much affected by this last one; and I think I may say that we felt keener interest in the fate of Admiral Sir P. Gangrene, Commander-in-chief at the Nore, than in the destruction of a few more forts that were built with money that should have been spent on ships. Admiral Gangrene, you may remember, after vainly telegraphing for assistance, had put to sea in his steam yacht, the *Wildfire*, accompanied by Flag Captain Counterpoise, with a view to observing the movements of the retreating Russians, and his return was no longer hoped for. It was not till long after the war was over that I learned how the gallant admiral was captured, only to be set ashore again on the first opportunity; his criticisms on their details of uniform and style of hair-dressing being more than his captors could endure. These episodes, the Indian mutiny, the investment of London, and the running away of our volunteer army corps, gave us plenty to talk about; but in the midst of it all we had one thing for self-congratulation. Though they had been unable to stamp out our cruisers on the high seas, the enemy

believed that all that remained of the British Navy in home waters was securely shut up in Plymouth Sound or at Chatham. Of the existence of Blake's flotilla no one seemed to have the least idea.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE DAY BEFORE



ON 29th October, the time being ripe, and our preparations complete, we put to sea with a fleet consisting of H.M.SS. *Rattlesnake*, *Niger*, *Hornet*, *Dasher*, *Speedy*, five torpedo-boats, and the colliers *Elizabeth E. Greenwood*, *Lilly*, *Blanche*, and *Emerald Lass*, which last two we had managed to pick up during our stay at Lamash. There should have been many more vessels, but, alas! they had gone to join the great majority since that meeting in the *Vernon*. The *Ailta* we left behind; she was too cumbersome to be of use with us.

Blake sent the *Lilly* over to Glasgow as we left, with instructions to let it be discovered that a British cruiser was or had been hiding



at Lamlash. The report soon found its way to the enemy ; and later, Lieut. Orchardston, who was left behind with a torpedo-boat to defend our base, managed to blow up a hostile vessel that crossed our mine field with a view to reconnoitring the harbour.

The *Lilly* having rejoined, our flotilla made for Luce Bay, which was reached in the early morning without anything hostile being sighted. Spending the day here, as soon as it was dusk we set off again over a practically deserted sea. Once we met a fishing-smack who, taking us to be an enemy, crowded on all sail and tried to escape. A torpedo-boat, overhauling him, learned from the terrified fisherman that an immense Russian ship was lying somewhere in Milford Haven. This was, though we did not know it then, none other than the celebrated *Rurik*.

Anxious as he was not to knowingly leave an enemy in our wake, our commodore hesitated to risk his torpedo-boats in an attempt to destroy the warship ; and he would probably have let her alone but for the project unfolded by Borcett senior. This was nothing less than to get into the water with a torpedo, swim to near the Russian, and then let the

weapon go on its errand of destruction. Since leaving this vessel behind might involve us in unforeseen difficulties, Blake at last consented to the arrangement; and No. 54 went off towards Dale Road, getting into Jack Sound without betraying her presence to anyone.

When night fell, Borcett's boat steamed cautiously to the mouth of the Haven, and there lowered her dingy. Fortunately the water was smooth and the night dark and foggy, while, the British fleet being presumably non-existent, the Russians were not likely to be expecting any attack. Nevertheless, they had boats out patrolling round the ship, which made it impossible for the dingy to get anywhere near her; however, as but for these boats the Borcetts might have hunted in vain for their quarry in the darkness, the circumstance was on the whole a favourable one.

The cruiser was lying close in shore by St. Anne's Head, and the boats covered a semi-circle some two thousand yards to seaward of her, the land side being left quite unguarded.

The dingy, which contained the two Borcetts and a bluejacket, rowed back to No. 54, and, after a consultation there, in towards the seashore, where after a while

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they found a landing-place; and here, by superhuman efforts, the three of them got the torpedo up over the cliffs and down again into Dale flats. The first streak of dawn was already in the sky, when Mr. Borcett, with a life-buoy around him, entered the water with the torpedo. The tide carried him out to where the *Rurik* was lying, some half-mile from his starting-point, and he had covered more than half the distance when a Russian with sharper eyes than his fellows noticed him, and fired a rifle. The shot was followed by a volley, but a man in the water is a poor target at the best of times, and Mr. Borcett was able to push the torpedo ahead of him, set the motive power to work, and let her go; and a minute later the career of the *Rurik* was ended for many weeks to come.

The gallant civilian was nearly dead from cold and exposure, and would have been drowned if his son and the bluejacket had not swum out to him; as it was, he had to be left in a cottage ashore. Borcett's boat joined us soon after sunrise, with news of the successful enterprise, a long and interesting account of which appears in *A Civilian's Reminiscences of the War*, by John Borcett, wherein the

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author modestly states that he got the idea from a similar episode that occurred in the manoeuvres several years before.

Just before sunrise, when off the Scillies, we made out a cruiser bearing down upon us, and failure seemed to again threaten our enterprise, for though our warships could give her the heels, the colliers were only too likely to fall a prey ; so there was nothing for it but to fight it out. Our torpedo-boats were skulking behind the colliers, and the enemy apparently took the whole lot of us for merchantmen, all of us being disguised. It was getting dark before she came within range of our aftermost collier—we had straggled out in apparent flight. The *Emerald Lass* stopped directly the cruiser fired, and the boats, coming suddenly out, torpedoed the vessel before she had got over her surprise ; and, two torpedoes striking her, she sank almost immediately. Blake steamed back to the spot, and found a few French sailors in one of their boats. As these, were they picked up by their friends, would have given information about us, we tried to take them prisoners ; but they made a desperate and gallant resistance before they were overcome and taken on board one of the colliers.

This task accomplished, we put into Penzance ; and great was the terror our arrival created in the morning, for we flew the Russian flag.

Lying in shore all day, and getting provisions and water,—which we took without asking, for the people had all fled from the town,—we left as night came on ; and daybreak next morning found us inside Exmouth bar, where a couple of ancient forts had been reduced to ruins by a hostile cruiser a few days before. It was a thick, heavy night coming round, and we saw nothing of the iron-clads supposed to be beleaguering Plymouth, beyond a stray ship that nearly ran down No. 45, and got torpedoed in return. The Solent was our objective, and Blake did not wish to risk an alarm reaching there for the sake of destroying a few ships off Plymouth that could very well wait till we came back again.

At Exmouth, where we still posed as Russians, Blake and many others of us went ashore, to get such newspapers as were obtainable. As an English-speaking Russian, our commodore interviewed some of the principal residents under a flag of truce ; and, getting hold of one who appeared to be trustworthy,

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revealed his true identity to him. The latter, who was taken completely by surprise, on his part told Blake that he had sent a messenger to Lympstone, the nearest telegraph office, with instructions to wire to Exeter for troops that must already be on their way. This was an awkward *contretemps* : we did not wish to shoot down our own countrymen ; but, on the other hand, if they once got to hear that we were an English force, the news might reach the enemy, and our great attack prove a failure. Finally, Blake decided to stay where we were under the flag of truce, and when the military arrived,—a company of the Devonshire Regiment Militia and a half battalion of volunteers,—they seemed disposed to go for our small force right away, and were with difficulty restrained. Of course, when Blake explained matters in confidence to Colonel Toppe-Higgins, the officer in command, the latter withdrew his troops, who were given to understand that an armistice was arranged till the evening ; and they spent the rest of the day in putting up entrenchments on the hill around the church. I do not know how it was that none of them recognised our uniforms, unless it was that all

naval uniforms are very similar to each other, and they could hardly be expected to be familiar with the details of the Russian one. Anyway, everybody seemed satisfied as to our foreign origin, and we were congratulating ourselves on a day in harbour without further trouble, when an incident occurred that nearly wrecked all our plans.

The residents, on learning that no fighting was likely to take place for several hours, got over their first terror; and soon we were surrounded by quite a crowd of people, curious to behold the dreaded foe. We, I should explain, were on the beach; the town-folk promenaded on the sea-wall to gaze at us; and it was while idly watching the procession that my eye lighted on a figure that seemed familiar to me, a lady dressed in deep mourning. She, or the people she was with, had just stopped to look at the supposed Russians, when she came almost face to face with Blake. For a moment they faced each other in silent astonishment, then, with a cry, "Edward, my darling—my love! you are not dead after all!" she rushed down the steps, and Blake held her in his arms.

He would have been more than human to

have been able to keep up the Russian disguise, and a moment later we were known to be English. Cheers rent the air, an enthusiastic crowd fell about us; we were welcomed as the saviours of a nation. The news spread like wildfire; our carefully-kept secret was ours no longer; it was the property of a thousand tongues.

Then it was that Garron of the *Hornet* saved us. Realising that, unless immediate measures were taken, the news would soon spread beyond the limits of Exmouth, he hastened to the soldiers and persuaded the colonel to form a cordon round the town. Recognising the importance of this precaution, that officer at once posted his men, with instructions to shoot anyone attempting to force a passage through; nor was he a moment too soon, for several people were captured, some of them after a lengthy chase, who had started for the nearest telegraph office to flash the good news about the country.

Blake and Miss Monckton had disappeared, nor did he rejoin us until it was time to be getting back to the ships. She and her father came down to the boat to see Blake off, and



I could not help overhearing their farewell words. Miss Monckton, I noticed, had already discarded her mourning, and was now dressed in something light.

"You are quite sure you forgive me, dear," I heard her saying, "for all I have made you suffer? And now, no sooner do we meet than we must part again, and God only knows if I shall ever see you more. I hear this awful war is nearly over. Oh, why need you go? Why cannot you stay here?"

"My darling," he made answer, "it is because peace is so near that I must go. My duty to my country calls me, and you would not have me go against that. What we shall do to-night, will, please God, alter the whole course of the campaign; and if it be fated that I see you no more, yet will you be happier for this meeting than had it not come about." And, giving her one long farewell kiss, he leaped into the boat, and we rowed back to the *Rattlesnake*.

"Come back, come back!" she cried to him in anguish; but fate was inexorable, and no return was possible. Vainly she stood in the crimson glow, land and sea around her dyed to colours of fire and blood as she stretched out

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white arms towards her lover till the red haze hid him from her eyes. It was a wild and stormy sunset, such an one as Turner used to paint at this very place, a fitting accompaniment to the scene, and a fitting portent to the bloody sequel now so close at hand. None of us, as we saw the sun sink behind the hills, could expect, or even hope, to see him rise again.

## CHAPTER XV

### WOMAN'S LOVE AND MAN'S DUTY



BLAKE hurried below as soon as we got on board, busying himself with the charts, setting our course with scrupulous care. Only too glad to be able to leave him to himself, I found work on deck, and was thus occupied when I heard the dip of oars, and a cry of "Boat ahoy!" from aft. I hastened towards the stern, to see Miss Monckton and her father coming to us in a shore-boat.

They came rapidly alongside, and the general was on board almost before the boat had lost the way on her. A minute later, and before I could think or say anything, he had helped his daughter on board; then, at a sign from him, the boat quickly made off into the gloom.

“Mr. Bouverie,”—it was Miss Monckton who spoke,—“will you be kind enough to tell Captain Blake that he is wanted on deck? You need not say by whom.” Her voice, always a low and sweet one, had now in it a ring of sad determination that told me for certain, what I had already guessed, that, regardless of consequences, she had decided to be with Blake at the last, whether he would or no.

I went below as desired, telling the skipper that he was wanted on deck, and moodily and listlessly he followed me there. I hurried forward, so as not to overhear the meeting, and hung about in the conning-tower till it was more than time to start on our errand. I was roused from the reverie into which I had fallen by seeing General Monckton making his way towards me.

“Look here, Mr. Bouverie,” said he bluffly enough, as became an old soldier, “I want a few words with you. Honestly, what are your chances to-night?”

I replied that we should probably succeed in sinking a large number of French and Russian ironclads, but that we ran grave risk of destruction both in entering the Solent, and in getting away.

"Meaning that you will in all human probability be sunk or captured?"

"Sunk possibly," I answered; "but Blake will never strike."

"No; from what I know of him, I should say that would be the last thing he would do. However, that is not the chief thing I wished to say. At present Blake is doing all he can to persuade my daughter to return on shore. I did all I could to prevent her coming on board, but here we both are. Now I know my daughter well; and you, from even the little you have seen of her, can perceive well enough that she is not one easily set aside from her purpose. She is a woman, and to a woman the fate of an empire is as nothing to the safety of the man she loves; I wish to warn you accordingly. If my daughter can disable your engines, or bring about your capture in any way, she will do so without the slightest hesitation."

"But Captain Blake would"—I began excitedly.

"Of what he might say or do she will reckon nothing in this matter," he interrupted. "I am an old man, with but a short time to live in any case; but it is hard to have to choose

between a daughter's life and an empire's existence. And what has England done to deserve to survive as a nation?" he added bitterly.

"Blake has wonderful luck," I said, with a hopefulness I was far from feeling. "He may pull us through all right, small though the chances seem."

"The pitcher that goes often to the well gets broken at last," retorted the general; "and though as a soldier I can't presume to give an expert opinion on a naval question, yet it seems to me that your *Rattlesnake* has little time left to float. But, in any case, duty is duty. If Lucy *will* choose to court death, I cannot save her at the expense of England; watch her, lest some misfortune befall your ship." Then he went sadly away, leaving me to worry over how best to act.

I knew Blake well enough to be certain that he would never let love stand before duty; but I was none the less anxious to save him from such a terrible dilemma as he might well find himself in, should Miss Monckton get an opportunity to put her supposed plans into execution. Yet what to do I could not settle.

Thorne was also hanging about in the conning-tower, so we consulted together, and finally decided to take turns at watching Miss Monckton ; and the lot having fallen upon me, I started upon my mission of espionage.

As anticipated, Blake had been quite unable to dissuade her from accompanying us, and when I came up he seemed to have given up the attempt, as they were standing near the stern in quiet conversation.

Blake had introduced me to her on shore, so I went up and uttered some commonplaces ; then, after a few minutes' desultory conversation, he persuaded her to go below while we got under way. His cabin had been placed at her service.

"By Jove," said Blake to me quite cheerily, "I'd no idea it was so late! Aren't you peckish yet? We must get dinner as we can, when we've got over the bar."

Signalling to our consorts, we began to get up anchor. Before I went to my post on the foke's'le, however, I exchanged a word with the general.

"All right," said he. "I'll go on duty now, and see that nothing happens while you're getting ready to start ; but I can't trust my-

self very long. It's a hard fight against a father's love."

Poor old man, he was nearly distracted at the turn of events; indeed, but for the fact that he had been a soldier, I should have been unable to feel any confidence in him whatever. As it was, I didn't feel over much.

We crept out of Exmouth, leaving all our colliers, behind, saving the *Lilly*. Captain Higgs was so anxious to accompany us right through, and so certain that he could be useful, that Blake had agreed to allow him to come. As events turned out, it was a good thing for us that he did.

Once beyond the bar, we made a straight course for Portland Bill, and Thorne going on watch, Blake and I hurried below to dinner.

The meal, such as it was, was quite a merry one. We all seemed to put on gaiety which, whether assumed or not, exercised a decidedly cheering influence. Miss Monckton, who was fortunately for her a good sailor, made merry over our crockery, which was in a sadly battered condition; and no stranger seeing the meal would have guessed that we expected it to be our last.

By and by she led the conversation round



to the ship, expressing particular curiosity about the engines.

"And I suppose," she said, after Blake had explained them to her,— "I suppose a piece of bursting shell, even a little bit, if it got among the wheels and things, would stop the ship."

He replied that of course it would; but, the engine-hatches being shut down, such an event was unlikely in the extreme.

Whatever suspicions I may have previously had were now strengthened, and the unsuspecting Blake had given her the knowledge she required.

A few minutes later we went on deck, Blake to the conning-tower forward, and I nominally to inspect the torpedo tubes, but in reality to lie in wait for our fair enemy.

Nothing happened, however. Miss Monckton came on deck and joined Blake in the conning-tower. "We shall have such a short time together, now, that every moment is precious to me," I heard her say to our captain; and doubtless he was of the same opinion.

Stealthily the *Rattlesnake* and her consorts slipped through the water. Fortune was with us again in the matter of weather, for the

night was thick and dark, with showers at intervals, while the sea was fairly smooth. In the gloom I could just see Miss Monckton, wrapped in Blake's overcoat, standing close to him forward, her tall figure silhouetted against the dimly white foam that shot from the *Rattlesnake's* bow. In the faint glow thrown up by the phosphorescence, I could see her light-brown hair blown across her face by the wind of our onward rush; and ever and anon I could hear the soft murmur of her voice. A strange picture, truly, in the tragedy of love and war!

Suddenly she disappeared! While I was yet craning my neck to see whether she had merely shifted her position, I heard a sound behind me, the sound of a hatchway being forced open by unaccustomed hands. Quick as thought, I turned and made for the engine-hatches.

A gleam of light shot up into the sky, lighting up Miss Monckton's face—with one hand she struggled to keep the hatch open, in the other she held a short iron bar.

There was no time to speak. Rushing forward, I seized her hands and pulled her from the hatch, which fell down again with a

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loud crash. The bar was in my hands now, and I threw it overboard, but not without a struggle; twice the now desperate girl hit me in the face with her ringed fingers, cutting down the side of my face.

Blake sang out angrily to know what the noise meant; and as I turned to reply, Miss Monckton wrenched herself free of me and darted behind the search-light. Fortunately no one had witnessed the encounter, and I explained to Blake that I had fallen down, getting a good telling off for my clumsiness at a time when silence was all important.

When he had gone again, I apologised as well as I could for my roughness, but she paid me little heed. The failure of her scheme seemed to have stultified Miss Monckton completely.

"Since I cannot save him, I will die by his side," was all she said, and then went forward again, leaving me to continue my watch in silence.

## CHAPTER XVI

### “TORPEDO TRIUMPHANS” : THE SAVING OF ENGLAND



THE French, believing the remnants of the British Navy to be safely shut up at Chatham or Plymouth, and so unsuspecting of any attack, had guarded the entrances to the Solent in very negligent fashion ; and for some time no look-outs were visible. In three lines we steamed slowly towards our quarry, the collier *Lilly* being some three or four cables ahead of us. Our centre line consisted of torpedo-boat No. 87, towing astern of her six dummy torpedo-boats which we had made during our stay at Lamlash. These were each a cable or so apart, the intervals being somewhat irregular, and the tow-line was under water all the way, so as to lessen the weight and save it

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from being cut through by shot. Our port, or inshore division, consisted of the *Ratto*, *Dasher*, and *Hornet*, the rest formed the starboard attack. All of us, even the dummy boats, flew the Russian ensign. It was a strange feeling to enter thus, as foes, the harbour that had never before been aught but English in the memory of man.

Everything having been practised and arranged at Lamlash, we took up this formation without a hitch, and, steaming thus in cautious fashion, at length sighted a small vessel ahead; a French scout, which turned her search-light on the *Lilly*. Captain Higgs, who had gone on with lights out so as to attract attention, had picturesquely wrecked his vessel for the occasion; with a dummy fore-funnel shorn of half its length, mainmast broken off short, and imitation shot-holes in her side, the *Lilly* looked as though she had just emerged from a hard-fought fight.

The Frenchman fired a gun across her bows as a signal for her to stop, which she immediately did, and, turning a search-light we had fitted her with full on the enemy, began making, at the same time, a series of heterogeneous signals that must have sorely puzzled

those who tried to read them. Blinded by the search-light, their attention occupied by the supposed Russian, none of the enemy saw us steal past until it was too late for them to interfere with our attack.

We had passed them ; and ahead of us lay two long lines of battleships, some looming up black and silent in the darkness, others lit up by the flashes of the random guns they had already begun to fire. Mostly they used no search-lights, fearing thereby to bewilder their gunners ; nor as yet were they certain in which direction to look. Before long, however, a chance beam from the electric light fell upon our leading torpedo-boat, now going for between the lines at her utmost speed, the dummies trailing well out astern of her. I suppose the Russian flag puzzled the French, for there was a lull in the firing, some signaling, shouting, and momentary indecision ; but as No. 87 reached the farther end of the lines, a vigorous cannonade began again, and at the same instant we heard the detonation of a couple of torpedoes. The psychological moment had come !

Blake blew his signal whistle ; we tore down the Russian flag, hoisting the white

ensign in its place ; and off we went between the shore and the enemy till we had passed the last of them ; then, circling round, we charged back to complete the work of destruction we had begun. Scarcely a shot came near us, as our torpedoes went home one after the other with a series of the most awful explosions I have ever witnessed. By the time we had been up the lines and down again,—a space of but a few minutes,—of all that great armada but two ships were left firing ; all the rest had sunk or run aground !

Our dummy boats, which had received the greater part of the enemy's attentions, held out well—too well in fact, since, with the exception of the leading boat, they had proved well-nigh indestructible, and, unless we could either destroy or take them away with us, it would be impossible to again practise this brilliant *ruse de guerre*. As it was, their recovery seriously delayed us, but at length one of the torpedo-boats managed to pick up a buoy that drifted astern of them, and, none too soon, we made back at full speed. Torpedo-boats were coming out of the harbour in shoals ; while ahead we could discern our old acquaintance, the scout we had passed coming in.

Blake, who had anticipated some trouble of this sort, at once signalled to our consorts to clear out independently and rendezvous off the Needles, and all immediately scattered in accordance with the prearranged plan.

The *Ratto* got out untouched, and, once past the Needles, slowed down to pick up such other vessels of our flotilla as might be about. The *Hornet*, *Dasher*, and two torpedo-boats, which had kept in sight, soon joined us, and eventually we made out the three queer-shaped funnels of the *Speedy*, as she laboured along in our wake, the five remaining dummies towing astern of her; but of our other vessels we saw nothing, though we looked for them long and anxiously.

Miss Monckton, who during the attack had been shut up in the conning-tower, now came out on deck, prematurely congratulating herself that the fighting was over. She was soon undeceived, however, by hearing our commodore giving orders for the attack on the other hostile fleet that we expected to find at Portland. Hitherto the girl had exercised restraint, but the prospect of this fresh danger did away with her self-control, and in front of Thorne and myself, within



hearing even of some of the crew, she urged Blake to abandon the enterprise.

"Have I no claim upon you too? Have not I, your affianced bride, a right to demand that you live for me?" we heard her passionately exclaim; but Blake was inexorable. Ashamed that through my indecision this trouble had come upon us, anxious to mend matters as much as lay in my power, I called out to man and arm ship on my own responsibility; and in the bustle of the moment Blake led her to the conning-tower again. Torn by conflicting emotions, compelled to endanger the life of the woman he loved, our skipper never wavered one moment, nor did he even exhibit any signs of annoyance at this last provocation. The certainty of ultimate destruction was now so strong, that all other feelings were smothered in its fatalism, the glamour of the death-watch was upon us. So much was this so, that it never occurred to any of us what a pretty scandal Miss Monckton's presence on board would cause, if by any off chance we should survive. I doubt if it ever struck her either, but she, at any rate, was past caring for anything, save her wild desire to save our captain's life.

At first we did not think we were being followed, but in this we were mistaken. A few miles from Portland Bill, just as we were making our final dispositions for the attack, several rockets went up astern of us, and after a brief interval these were answered by others ahead. All these signals were similar to those made by the enemy in the Solent, white and green stars turning to red, evidently a distinguishing signal.

It had been our intention to stop about here, in order to transfer some spare torpedoes to our boats which were now unarmed, but the discovery of our presence by the enemy made this a grave risk; it seemed better to attack with our larger ships only, and this we started to do. As yet the strangers could not tell our exact whereabouts, while their signals made their own positions pretty plain; though we were not yet able to discover whether the ships ahead were merely scouts, or the Russian Portland fleet. Till this should be ascertained, it was our policy not to attack them, lest, catching the sprat, we should lose the mackerel.

Blake altered course, and we stood for the shore at sixteen knots, passing quite un-

observed within a mile of the advancing warships. In a few more minutes Portland would be open to us.

In the excitement, I had forgotten all about Miss Monckton, though I should have known that she would seize any opportunity that might present itself to wreck our plans. When the thought of her suddenly flashed across my mind, I started to look for her; but I was too late!

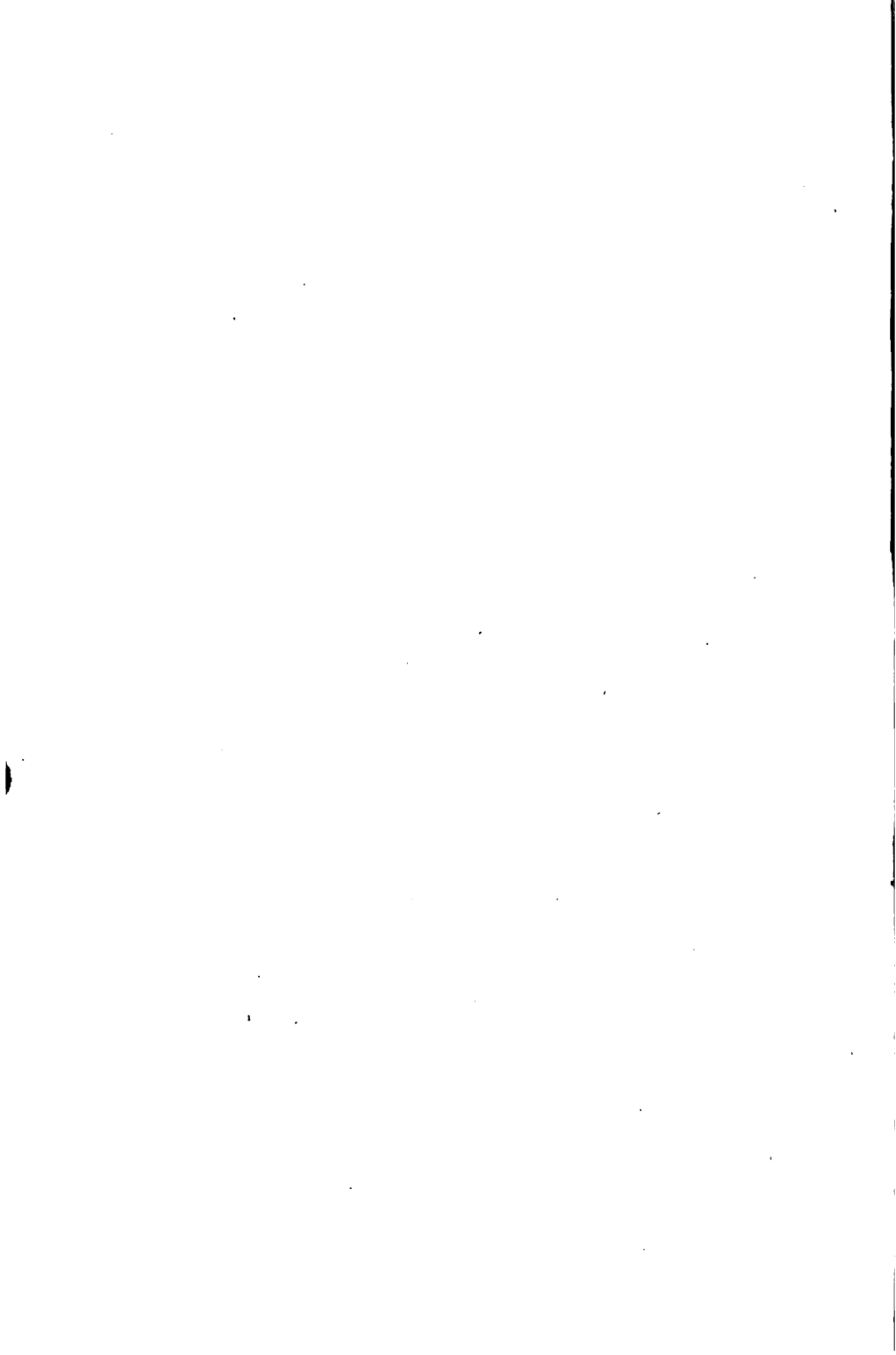
Hard by the conning-tower was a rocket ready in position for firing, the string hanging within easy reach of anyone. As I came in sight of it, Blake was standing up by the 12-pounder watching the enemy through his night-glasses, Miss Monckton below him was gazing at the rocket. In an instant I divined her purpose, but I was too far away to prevent it. I called out to her not to touch it, but even as I called, she pulled the string. With a hiss and a roar the rocket flew blazing into the sky, lighting up the waters all around us, and betraying our exact position to the enemy!

Blake dropped his glasses as though he had been shot, and immediately jumped on to the deck beside her. I expected an ex-



EVEN AS I CALLED SHE PULLED THE STRING, AND WITH A HISS  
AND A ROAR THE ROCKET FLEW BLAZING INTO THE SKY . . .  
BETRAYING OUR EXACT POSITION TO THE ENEMY !

*Page 256.*



plosion, but his first words were to inquire whether she was hurt; he was unsuspecting even yet.

“You have done for us now, Lucy,” he said gently, when she had assured him that the rocket had done her no harm. “How on earth did you manage to get entangled in it?”

For a minute there was a pause, then—

“I did it on purpose,” she answered slowly.

“On purpose?” he repeated, scarce seeming to understand her.

“On purpose. See! the enemy are coming back; we shall be captured. Only capture will save you from your suicidal self!”

“The *Ratto* will never be captured, Lucy; you have only helped to sink her a little sooner,” was all he said. Her motive was so plain, her loving desperation so apparent, that he had not the heart to be angry with her; but on his face came a look that made me wonder whether, holding it to be his duty, he was going to have her thrown overboard.

There was no time now for any more speech; the enemy were coming up rapidly, firing randomly at us as they came.

Now to port, now to starboard we rushed;

but the enemy were not to be shaken off. We in the destroyers might have bolted through them, but this would have entailed the sacrifice of the *Speedy* and probably of the torpedo-boats as well, and for this Blake was not prepared. The strange vessels, swift as ourselves, kept pace with us; evidently they were uncertain of our strength and power, and were waiting till daylight should enable them to destroy us at long range.

At length the dreaded dawn broke, and we could make out the black forms of hostile cruisers steaming with us as we made down Channel. The sea ahead was comparatively clear, and there was just a chance that we might yet get away. Presently the enemy began to signal rapidly; their leading vessels slowed down—from their lofty tops they had sighted something ahead; but whether it was a death-trap into which we were speeding, we could not yet ascertain. Still, whatever might be ahead, we could not stop to fall into the hands of our pursuers, and so we sped along till we made out a number of battle-ships coming towards us in wide single column of line abreast.

Tired out and exhausted as we were, we

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braced ourselves for another fight, but long ere we had got within range of them, we made out the centre vessel. She could, even at that distance, be none other than the old *Thunderer*. We approached the fleet warily enough, nevertheless, lest they should prove to be in hostile hands; while they regarded us with equal suspicion.

After a while they began to signal to us, and we having made our numbers, which could just be distinguished in the dawning light, they sent on a cruiser flying a white flag; then, satisfied as to who we were, signalled to us to fall in astern.

The *Thunderer*, it may be remembered, had been badly torpedoed on the first night of the war, and had only got out of dockyard hands in time to be shut up in Plymouth. Her captain semaphored to us that they had broken out of Plymouth Sound the previous night, destroyed some of the blockading fleet (which had already been severely handled by the Maker forts), and were now in hot pursuit of the remainder, who had fled away up Channel; and these presumably were some of the ships we had met and so narrowly escaped from.



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The fleet, with the *Thunderer*, consisted of the old ironclads *Agincourt*, *Dreadnought*, *Hercules*, *Sultan*, *Rupert*, *Neptune*, *Devastation*, *Bellerophon*; the cruisers *Talbot*, *Sappho*, and *Phæbe*; and one torpedo-boat—a Thorneycroft boat whose number I forget; and these were all that was left of the British Navy, save ships on foreign stations, and a tag-rag and bobtail fleet of badly damaged ironclads, including the half-completed *Illustrious*, that had been telegraphed to, to break out from Chatham—the forts of which had so far prevented attacks from the land—on the Russians at the Nore.

Blake on his part signalled back—"that in the last few days we had between Lamlash and Plymouth torpedoed the *Rurik* and two other vessels unknown; that we had been into the Solent the previous night, and during our visit had sunk or disabled some twenty French warships."

Further communication was interrupted by a movement of the enemy ahead. It was now light enough to see them fairly well, and we could count a good twenty large ships, besides a number of small craft. Astern of the British ironclads a dozen or more other

ships were visible; a great battle was imminent, a battle against overwhelming odds. The enemy's present movements were confined to a change of formation, however; they made no attempt to attack our entrapped fleet. Either they hoped to force us to surrender by a show of superior force, or else the daily expected peace made their admirals doubtful as to the advisability of risking the loss of any more ships while destroying the British. It was now quite light, and the rising sun showed us columns of smoke on the eastern horizon—yet another fleet coming up to join in the naval Armageddon. The British admiral, unable to steam at much above ten knots, made no attempt to escape; it would have been utterly useless to try and do so with the enemy's swift vessels so near—he was practically surrounded.

Thorne and I stormed at the dilatoriness of our admiral.

“He's just letting them collect, so as to have a good number to strike to,” I said.

“No,” said Blake, coming up to us. “He thinks the fleet steaming down are our ships from Chatham, though the enemy fancy they are Russians. In any case, the fight will

begin in a few minutes more." He paused, then went on in a strained voice, avoiding our eyes: "Before it does, Miss Monckton must leave the *Rattlesnake*; and so I want to ask a favour of you, Bouverie. We've been shipmates together all through the war, and, on the strength of it, I ask you to leave the ship now."

"To do what, sir?" I inquired in wonder.

"Miss Monckton must leave the ship; I cannot have her go down with the *Rattlesnake*. Take her off in the boat, now; now, at once. Get her to the shore, if possible; or, if you cannot do that, on board one of the battle-ships. I can fight this fight without you, as I've settled what to do; but I cannot send her adrift at the mercy of a couple of blue-jackets."

"But her father, sir?"

"Lies dead in the wardroom. The strain and excitement have been too much for him. It's a hard thing to do, old man, I know; it makes you seem a runaway, so I *ask* instead of order you."

"I am ready, sir," was all I said; and he grasped my hand in a farewell shake. "God bless you, Bouverie!" he added brokenly.

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Miss Monckton was half dead from exposure and terror; the sudden death of the old general had completely upset her; and when Blake told her to get into the boat, she obeyed him mechanically.

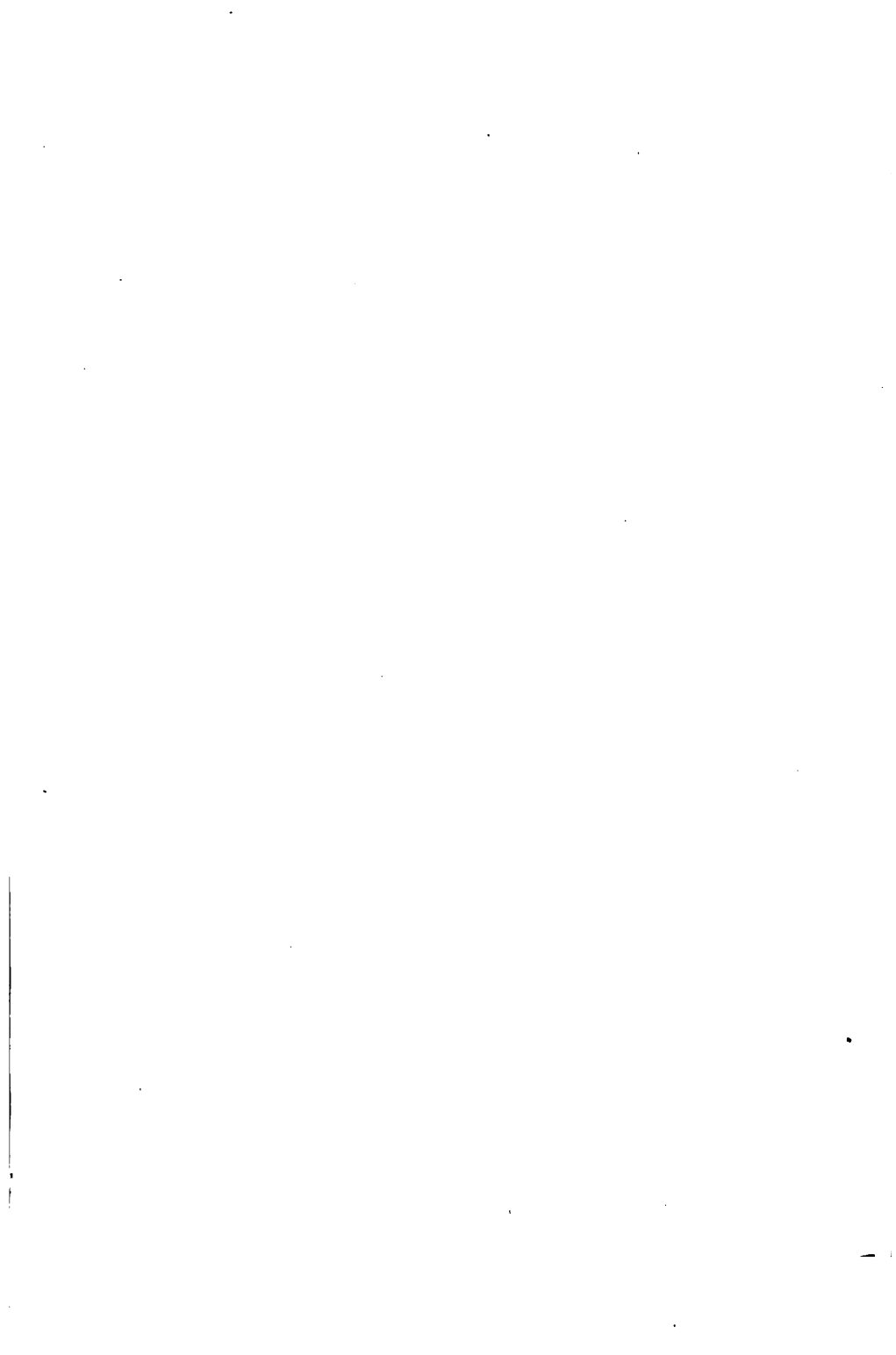
I was already in the boat with the single bluejacket that Blake could spare me, and directly she had taken her place in the stern, we shoved off, rowing our hardest. Blake, not trusting himself to speak, hurried back to his post on top of the conning-tower; but the sad drama was not ended. We had rowed but a few strokes from the doomed vessel when Miss Monckton awoke to what was going on, and sprang to her feet with a piercing scream of terror that wrung my very heart.

"Edward, Edward, for God's sake don't send me away from you! Let me stay and die with you—die with you! I don't want to live when you are gone!" With a strength born of anguish and despair she seized my oar, and, despite my efforts to prevent her, backed water with it. Not daring to meet her eyes, I put my head down to hide my face, and pulled my very hardest against her. Presently her strength failed, and, abandoning the

attempt, she made as though to jump into the sea, but, holding fast on to her, I prevented that also. Gradually her struggles ceased, and she sank down into the bottom of the boat in a swoon.

Over the water in sad accents came the voice of Blake — "Good-bye, my darling, good-bye!" and then the *Rattlesnake* made away to her doom.

Guns were firing and signals flying, and through the smoke I could see the light squadrons of the opposing fleets charging at each other. In a moment they seemed to meet, a brief cloud of smoke and flame, then out of the mêlée emerged the *Ratto*, *Dasher*, and *Hornet*, steering straight for the hostile battleships at thirty miles an hour. The water around them was lashed into foam by the shot and shell, but they held their way unchecked. They reached the leading iron-clads, the spume of torpedo explosions rose like waterspouts; then they vanished in the mist, and, strain our eyes as we would, no trace of them was visible. The firing increased in intensity, the big guns taking their turn too, for by now some of the belligerent iron-clads were within range of each other.





THEN CAME THE ROAR OF A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION, AND I KNEW THAT BLAKE AND THE  
"RATTLESNAKE" WERE NO MORE!

*Page 265.*

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Suddenly, through a rift in the smoke, I saw the *Ratto*, torn and battered, much down by the head. Before her were two huge ironclads that had collided in the confusion caused by Blake's attack. She was evidently sinking, but the British flag still flew from her ensign staff above the shot-splashed water. Hours seemed to pass as she crawled nearer and nearer to the battleships now towering above her—two or three pregnant minutes at the most.

There came a lull in the firing, a lull of foreboding. The ships touched! As they did so, a mighty column of mingled flame and water leaped into the air, and, falling, hid everything from my sight. Then came the roar of a terrific explosion, and I knew that Blake and the *Rattlesnake* were no more. He had blown her up in the midst of the foe!

So enraptured was I in watching this terrible episode, that I had left the boat to drift by herself. Shot was now falling around us, and, pull as we would against the tide, we could not gain the shore. In the course of our struggles we were hailed from the *Thunderer*, and soon we were alongside her. The great ironclad slowed down, a rope



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was thrown to us, and Miss Monckton, still in her swoon, taken on board and sent below. The fight was growing in intensity, and now was not the moment for explanations. I was hastily told off to take the post of a sub who, poor fellow, was already down; but of what I did or how we fared in that battle of giants, I have but little, if any, coherent recollection.

It suffices to say, that some hours later, when the firing ceased, a large portion of the Plymouth and Chatham squadrons still floated, bruised and battered, but victorious. Guns behind armour had conquered, and seven French and Russian ironclads, now flying the white ensign, were our fruits of victory. The rest of our gallant foes had gone down with colours flying.

This battle, as everybody knows, ended the war. The fleet cruised about the Channel for a few days, but there were no more fights; the enemy had had enough of it. The last week, thanks mostly to Blake, had cost them some forty warships; the *Ratto* alone, in blowing up with all that dynamite on board, had taken two ironclads to the bottom with her, and severely damaged a third; and altogether the enemy were without any fleets

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suitable to continue the war. Their deadly Q. F. guns had made little impression on the *Thunderer* and her completely armoured consorts, which were soon fit for sea as ever; cruisers from foreign stations were daily arriving home, having cleared distant waters of all hostile vessels; and the Allies, hampered by Nihilists and Anarchists at home, were only too anxious to end a war that threatened to continue only to their disadvantage. And so, as everyone knows, the great peace came about.

In conclusion I must explain, what I should, perhaps, have made clearer before, that this little tale is in no way intended to compete with the more elaborate histories of the war that have appeared in the last few years; my claim to be read lies in my being, I fear, the only survivor of those who knew Blake and were with him when he and his fellow torpedo men saved England, and laid down their lives for her sake.

Whether England was worth the sacrifice, is a question that those who look around them cannot have much difficulty in answering. The self-sacrifice of her sailors has brought England a spell of peace again; it has created

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a large number of desirable berths in the War Pension Office ; it has given an open field for the exercise of parliamentary and party fudge for some years to come : but the patriotic outburst of the closing months of 189- has fizzled out long ago, the starving of the navy goes on just as it did before the war, and though improvements have been effected in many details, yet minor considerations outweigh the more important issues as of old.

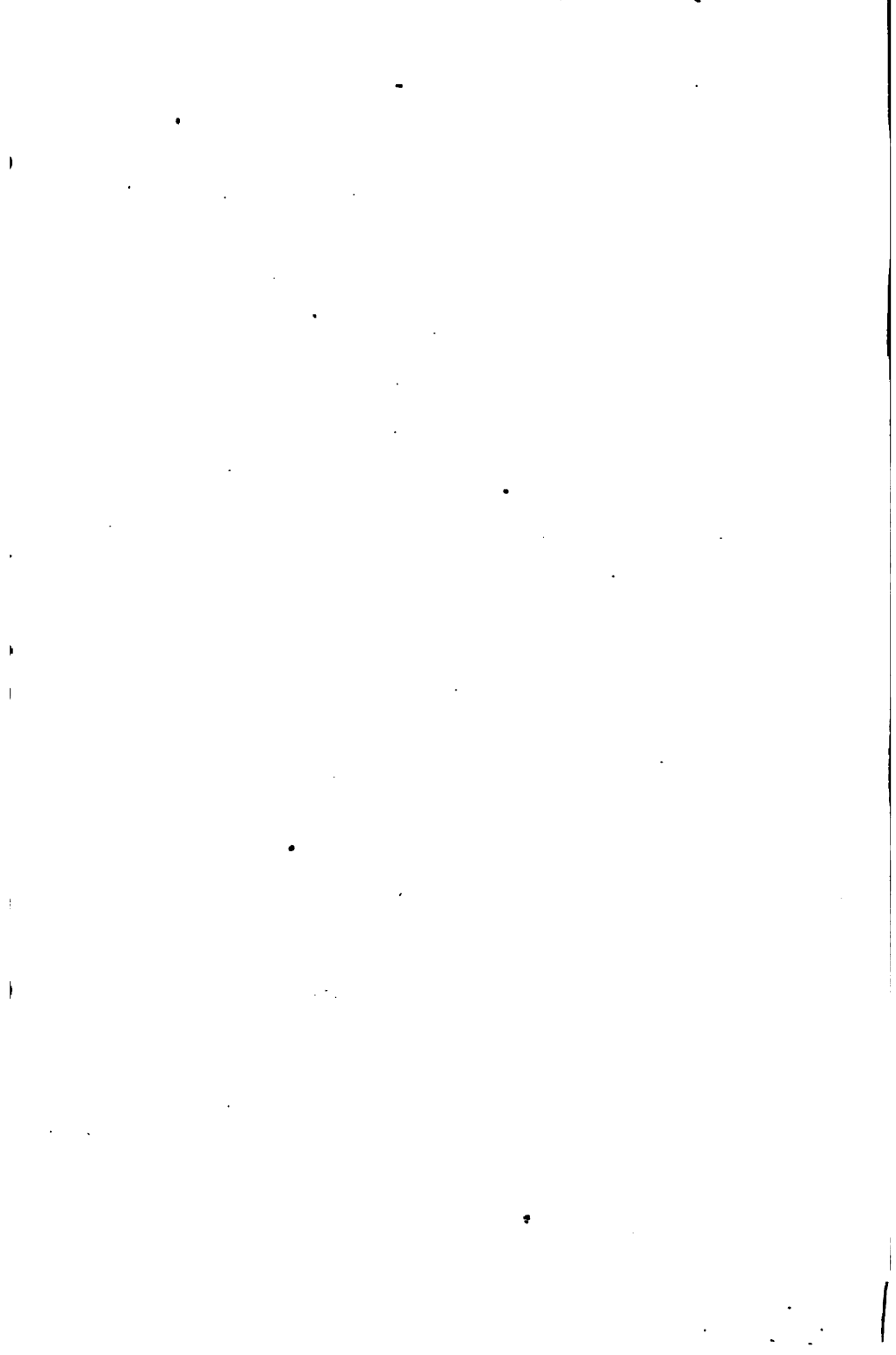
Now and again I hobble to St. Paul's, where some who had been shipmates with them before the war, placed a monument to the memory of Blake and the "Arranites" ; and as I gaze on its stony grandeur, I often wish that my name too were on that marble slab. Blake was better dead with glory ; for had he lived, all that he had done would scarcely have atoned for his revolt. Indeed, I was court-martialled for my small share in it, and though let off without any special punishment, my naval career ended with the war—the credit and glory of which was usurped by the military. The navy was thanked for its "assistance" in the closing days ; the mass of the honour went to an army of volunteers

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that defeated the French, who—Blake's attack having lost them the command of the sea—were retreating in disorderly haste towards Portsmouth.

Miss Monckton never recovered from the double shock of that memorable and fateful night. For a while she haunted Blake's tomb, a tall, black-clad figure worn with grief; but she has long since gone to join him where the weary are at rest.

THE END.



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